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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES FOR THE 1990s

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1 - 2	3
II.	RECENT ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES	3 - 7	3
III.	ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP AND MONITORING, AND REVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION	8 - 31	5
	A. Follow-up at the national level	9 - 10	5
	B. Follow-up at the regional level	11 - 18	5
	C. Follow-up at the global level	19 - 26	8
	D. Other follow-up action	27 - 31	9
IV.	ACTION BY ORGANS, ORGANIZATIONS AND BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM	32 - 58	11
	A. United Nations	33 - 40	11
	B. Specialized agencies and related organizations	41 - 58	13

* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

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CONTENTS (continued)

		Paragraphs	Page
V.	INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT MEASURES	59 - 87	18
	A. External resources	59 - 64	18
	B. External debt and debt relief	65 - 72	20
	C. External trade	73 - 87	21
VI.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	88 - 94	24

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 50/103 of 20 December 1995, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-second session a report on the implementation of that resolution. By that resolution the Assembly reaffirmed the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s as the basis for continuing cooperation between the least developed countries and their development partners[1] and endorsed the measures and recommendations agreed upon at the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Mid-term Global Review of the Programme of Action.[2] The Assembly also called upon all Governments, international and multilateral organizations, financial institutions and development funds, the organs, organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, and all other organizations concerned to take immediate, concrete and adequate steps to implement the Programme of Action, taking full account of the measures and recommendations of the mid-term global review. In the same resolution, the Assembly emphasized the need for national policies and measures aimed at establishing macroeconomic stability by rationalizing public expenditure and adopting sound monetary and fiscal policies so as to ensure a dynamic private sector by such means as providing a sound legal framework and improving human resources development, living standards, health and the status of women, and called upon the international community to provide adequate support thereto. Further, the Assembly strongly urged all donor countries to implement fully and expeditiously their commitments in all relevant areas, including the agreed menu of aid targets and commitments as set out in the Programme of Action and support to reinforce structural adjustment reform, as well as the measures agreed upon at the mid-term global review so as to provide a significant and substantial increase in the aggregate level of external support for the least developed countries.[3]

2. In the light of the above, section II below gives an overview of the recent economic performance of the least developed countries, and the policies and measures adopted by them in line with the provisions of the Programme of Action. Section III sets out the overall arrangements made for the implementation, follow-up and monitoring, and review of the Programme of Action; section IV describes in more detail the measures taken by the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system; and section V presents available information on international support measures in the fields of external resources, debt and trade.

II. RECENT ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

3. Over the past several years, many of the least developed countries have undertaken wide-ranging reform policies and measures, often under internationally agreed frameworks, for structural and sectoral adjustment. As they moved along the path of reform, their objectives became more complex and ambitious, shifting from the limited concerns of macroeconomic imbalances and stabilization to the promotion of development by a plethora of market-oriented reforms, including the improvement of economic efficiency, curbing of public

sector intervention, encouragement of the private sector and liberalization of the external trade sector. The resulting improved and sustained macroeconomic stability in several least developed countries and the good weather conditions and strength in the international demand for the exports of African least developed countries are the main reasons for the third year of relatively strong growth and rising per capita output in the least developed countries.

4. Preliminary estimates indicate that the growth rates of gross domestic product (GDP) in the least developed countries for which data are available averaged 4.7 per cent in 1996.[4] The growth rate of the African least developed countries in 1996 was estimated at 4.6 per cent, which implies that per capita output rose for the second consecutive year, after a very long period in which per capita output levels declined. Eleven African least developed countries achieved growth rates equal to or exceeding 6 per cent, the target set in the United Nations new Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s,[5] while the number of countries whose growth rate was negative had significantly diminished from seven in 1995 to two in 1996. There were, however, significant disparities in performance among individual African least developed countries. A number of African least developed countries, which have consistently implemented economic reforms and have avoided or could overcome serious political instability and civil strife, have begun to generate growth rates of 4.5 per cent or more which enabled significant increases in per capita income to be attained; this group includes Cape Verde, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda. In contrast, least developed countries which have been unable to resolve serious internal conflicts, maintain political stability or consistently implement the necessary economic reforms have experienced, at best, continued economic stagnation and, at worst, economic collapse.

5. The average growth rate of the Asian least developed countries rose slightly in 1996 but remained significantly lower than the regional average for developing countries. Buoyed by strong growth in agriculture, the economy of Bangladesh grew at 4.7 per cent in 1996, compared to 4.5 per cent in 1995. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the economy grew by 6.9 per cent in 1996 compared to 7.2 per cent in 1995. The economies of Cambodia and Myanmar grew by 6 per cent in 1996 compared to 7.6 per cent and 9.8 per cent, respectively, in 1995. Good weather for agriculture facilitated a marked acceleration in economic growth in Nepal, from 3.4 per cent in 1995 to 6.1 per cent in 1996.

6. Among the Pacific and Indian Ocean island least developed countries, there was robust growth of over 6 per cent in Maldives, and 4 per cent in Solomon Islands in 1996. Haiti, the only least developed country in the Western hemisphere, experienced an economic slowdown in 1996, with growth in GDP falling to 2 per cent from 4 per cent in the previous year.

7. While the overall economic performance in the least developed countries has improved, poverty remains pervasive and the majority of the population in the least developed countries suffers from reduced caloric intakes, increased mortality and morbidity, the re-emergence and spread of disease and lower school enrolment.

III. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP AND MONITORING, AND REVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION

8. The Programme of Action emphasized the importance of effective follow-up and monitoring mechanisms to support the development efforts of the least developed countries as crucial to the successful implementation of the Programme during the 1990s. Arrangements for the implementation, follow-up and monitoring, and review of the Programme were built on a three-tier structure of national, regional and global levels.

A. Follow-up at the national level

9. At the national level, review arrangements, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-sponsored round-table meetings and the World Bank consultative and aid groups, organized by the least developed countries with the support of the respective organizations, have been further consolidated during the early 1990s, with additional countries joining or rejoining the process and meetings taking place more frequently and on a more regular basis. A strengthened country review process was considered the principal means of policy dialogue and for coordinating the aid efforts of development partners with the development programmes of least developed countries, as well as for mobilizing the required resources for their implementation. In all, about 90 consultative aid groups and round tables or similar meetings were organized between the adoption of the Programme of Action and early 1997. While results in terms of resource mobilization have varied between countries, those meetings have played an important role in improving aid flows to the least developed countries and in aid coordination. An important aspect of the country review process in recent years has been the attempt to link those arrangements more closely to national policy-making and programming.

10. Nineteen of the least developed countries (typically among those with large populations) had or are having consultative or aid group arrangements co-sponsored by the World Bank, while most others have had recourse to UNDP-supported round-table meetings since that aid coordination process was set up on a broader scale after the first United Nations Conference on the least developed countries in 1981. In 1995-1996, consultative or aid groups were convened for 10 of the least developed countries, while round-table meetings were held for 7 least developed countries. Country review activities also included special meetings of donors and sectoral meetings held in the recipient countries.

B. Follow-up at the regional level

11. The Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s called upon the regional commissions to contribute to the follow-up process by addressing, as part of their ongoing work, the needs and problems of the least developed countries. Moreover, the regional commissions were asked to monitor, in coordination with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the progress made in economic cooperation among the least developed countries and other developing countries, particularly those in the same region, and to organize, on a regular basis, cluster meetings with all countries

concerned in order to improve and strengthen existing cooperation arrangements at the regional and subregional levels.

12. From 1997, the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in favour of the African least developed countries will be carried out in the context of the new programme orientation, known as "Serving Africa better: strategic direction for the Economic Commission for Africa". Under the strategic direction, the focus will be on facilitating economic and social policy analysis, enhancing food security and sustainable development, strengthening development management, harnessing information for development, and promoting regional cooperation and integration. Two issues, relating to the promotion of women in development and capacity-building, will underpin the five areas of focus. Since 33 of the 53 States members of ECA are least developed countries, special emphasis will be placed on problems of particular concern to them, such as social development issues, and on strategies to alleviate poverty.

13. The following activities were carried out by ECA in each of the above-mentioned areas: in collaboration with the World Bank, a forum on cost-sharing in the social sectors of sub-Saharan Africa was held at Addis Ababa, from 18 to 20 June 1997, at which most of the Government delegations were from least developed countries; a regional workshop on poverty monitoring, measurement and public expenditure in sub-Saharan Africa, held at Addis Ababa, from 24 to 27 June 1997, at which 4 of the 13 Government delegations were from least developed countries, namely Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi and Uganda; and, together with the World Bank, a road management initiative seminar for countries members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was convened at Abidjan, in June 1997.

14. Several activities are in preparation: a study on the problem of inter-country cooperation in the Zambesi area; a study on the magnitude of physical impediments (tariff and non-tariff barriers) and their impact on intra-African trade, and trade and production factors, mobility and regional development patterns; an evaluation report on the projects of least developed countries during the Second United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa, which will be submitted to the Ministerial Conference on Transport and Communications to be held in November 1997; and a study of the dynamics of food security, population and environmental conservation, which will focus on the least developed countries and whose objective is to determine the interlinkages between population growth and environmental conservation on the one hand and food security on the other.

15. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) continues to give priority to assisting the 13 least developed countries in the ESCAP region, in particular, in areas emphasized in the Programme of Action and the mid-term global review. An analysis of macroeconomic performance in these countries appears every year in the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific. These countries are also given priority in accessing the United Nations regular programme of technical cooperation and in benefiting from economic and technical activities offered by other developing countries of the region. The Special Body on Least Developed and Land-locked Developing Countries, established in 1992, is an intergovernmental body which meets every two years to review and monitor economic and social progress in the least

developed countries and to identify and recommend new policy measures. At its fifty-third session, the Commission, in a resolution on the restructuring of ESCAP, recommended that the Special Body on Least Developed and Land-locked Developing Countries should meet in 1999 to conduct a final review of the implementation of the Programme of Action in the Asian and Pacific region. In addition, the terms of reference of the five committees of the Commission require that the special concerns of the least developed, land-locked and Pacific island developing countries be adequately addressed.

16. The ESCAP secretariat is executing several projects for least developed countries in the area of exchange of experience among policy makers in the least developed countries and with their counterparts from the more advanced developing countries in the region. This activity directly responds to the concerns and recommendations contained in the Programme of Action and the recommendations of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Mid-term Global Review of the Implementation of the Programme of Action. In addition, during the period January 1996-March 1997, ESCAP undertook a number of other activities in favour of the least developed countries, such as meetings, training courses and fellowships, in areas related to export promotion and trade facilitation, infrastructure, energy and water, transport facilities, development of strategies for sustainable agriculture, youth participation in development and drug demand reduction. Advisory services were also provided under the United Nations regular programme of technical cooperation to 11 least developed countries during 1996.

17. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has carried out several studies and reports with respect to the economic and social situation in Yemen. The country has also been regularly covered in the annual survey of economic and social developments in the ESCWA region. Moreover, it has been given priority in the area of technical assistance in various economic and social fields. During the past four years, a number of research activities have been undertaken in different socio-economic areas. During 1996-1997, ESCWA provided technical assistance to Yemen in the preparation of several technical documents, and in the strengthening of planning and programming capabilities of relevant ministries, women organizations and non-governmental organizations.

18. Action undertaken by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has been focused on the systematic analysis of factors influencing the economic performance of Haiti, with a view to making policy recommendations and the formulation of projects in priority areas. As a result of the restoration of the constitutional civil regime in October 1994, this work is being followed up in the field by means of periodic mission contacts with the Haitian authorities, private institutions and bilateral and multilateral organizations in the country. Interaction with various institutions, as well as a regular update of economic performance and dissemination of its results, have facilitated the formulation of projects by the Government and several United Nations and inter-American organizations and agencies.

C. Follow-up at the global level

19. The Programme of Action and the General Assembly entrusted UNCTAD with the focal role, at the global level, for the monitoring, follow-up and review of the implementation of the Programme of Action. The document adopted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development at its ninth session, entitled "A Partnership for Growth and Development",[6] reaffirmed that mandate.

20. Issues pertaining to the least developed countries were considered by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development at its ninth session. The Conference recognized the plight of the least developed countries and the need to ensure their effective participation in the world trading system. In the Midrand Declaration,[7] member States of the Conference stated that it should be recognized that countries entered the new rules-based system of the World Trade Organization (WTO) from very different starting points; that, accordingly, the impact of globalization and liberalization was uneven; and that the least developed countries, particularly those in Africa, remained constrained by weak supply capabilities and were unable to benefit from trade. It was also stressed in the Declaration that special attention should be paid to creating an overall enabling environment at a policy and institutional level for the least developed countries.

21. The Conference called for action to be taken, as appropriate, to maximize the opportunities and to minimize the difficulties of the least developed countries in adjusting to the changes introduced by the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations agreements.[8] Governments were urged to implement fully and expeditiously the Marrakesh Ministerial Decision on Measures in Favour of Least Developed Countries. The Conference also called for the effective application of the Marrakesh Ministerial Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries.[9]

22. The Conference decided that issues relating to the least developed countries would be considered throughout the intergovernmental machinery of UNCTAD. Furthermore, it decided that the responsible entity in the secretariat of UNCTAD for the least developed, land-locked and small island developing countries should coordinate the sectoral work, monitor the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s and other relevant United Nations programmes of action and provide input for review by the Trade and Development Board. To give operational content to those decisions, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD launched a special initiative on the least developed countries comprising both substantive and operational activities on a cross-sectoral basis throughout the UNCTAD programme. The substantive activities include policy research and analytical work, and are aimed at assisting the least developed countries to formulate national policies and actions in a changing world, and at contributing to the policy dialogue between the least developed countries and their partners in different forums. The operational activities seek to provide practical assistance to the least developed countries. An important aim of the activities is to strengthen the supply capacities of the least developed countries in tradeable goods and services. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD has established the Office of the Special Coordinator for Least Developed Countries and the Steering Committee on

Least Developed Countries. The Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Secretary-General and meets on a regular basis, is the highest level planning body for the major analytical and substantive work of UNCTAD on the least developed countries. Its objective is to promote, at the policy level, coordination and coherence of action related to the least developed countries.

23. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/206 of 21 December 1990 and the outcome of the ninth session of the Conference, the Trade and Development Board conducted, at its forty-third session, the sixth annual review of the progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s. As a background document for the discussion, it had before it The Least Developed Countries 1996 Report.[4] The Board reaffirmed the outcome of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Mid-term Global Review of the Programme of Action and the outcome of the ninth session of the Conference, as they related to the trade of the least developed countries and trade-related issues.

24. The Board emphasized the importance of strengthening the supply capacity of the least developed countries to produce exportable goods and services on a competitive basis in order to reap the potential benefits from the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations agreements. It encouraged the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to elaborate throughout UNCTAD integrated country-level programmes for selected least developed countries by pooling the contributions of its Divisions, in accordance with the priorities identified by the least developed countries concerned.

25. The Board also called upon UNCTAD to closely collaborate and coordinate with the organizations concerned, such as WTO, the International Trade Centre (UNCTAD/WTO) (ITC), the World Bank, UNDP, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and other development organizations, in the design and implementation of the above activities in order to ensure coherence in policy advice and support. In pursuance of that decision, the UNCTAD secretariat has initiated in Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Gambia and Madagascar integrated country programmes for strengthening the export supply capacities of the least developed countries.

26. The Board requested the UNCTAD secretariat and the three UNCTAD intergovernmental commissions, in carrying out their tasks, to pay particular attention to the special needs of the least developed countries. It also decided that, in presenting their reports to the Board, the commissions should, wherever possible, seek to highlight the results of particular relevance to the least developed countries.

D. Other follow-up action

27. As the focal point in the United Nations system for monitoring the implementation of the Programme of Action at the global level, UNCTAD coordinates and programmes its work with regional commissions and other organizations within and outside the United Nations system and draws upon the substantial research and analytical capacity existing in the system on the social and economic situation of the least developed countries. It provides

substantive services to the machinery of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) on issues relating to the least developed countries, participates in UNDP round-table meetings and consultative group processes of the World Bank, and the Paris Club meetings on debt related to the least developed countries. It also assists the least developed countries to undertake consultations among themselves on matters of common interest to them in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action, and it contributes to the work of the Committee for Development Planning related to criteria used for the identification of the least developed countries.

28. In setting out the overall arrangements for the review and monitoring of the progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action at various levels, the General Assembly, by resolution 45/206, also decided that the organizations of the United Nations system should undertake sectoral appraisals at regular intervals. A number of organizations have continued to make arrangements for the required follow-up to the Programme of Action and the conclusions and recommendations arising from its mid-term review.

29. By the same resolution, the Assembly recommended that necessary links should be established between the follow-up to the Programme of Action at the national, regional and global levels and decided that the Conference, apart from serving as the focal point for follow-up at the global level, should continue to provide support at the national and regional levels. In the context of establishing the necessary links between follow-up at the national and global levels in particular, the UNCTAD secretariat has been requested to participate in and contribute to the country-review process mentioned in paragraph 141 of the Programme of Action. In response to those provisions, UNCTAD participated in round-table meetings held in 1996 and 1997. It also participated in the fifty-third session of ESCAP, the fourth session of the ESCAP Special Body on Least Developed and Land-locked Developing Countries, and in the thirty-second session of ECA. Participation in those meetings provided an opportunity to brief the ECA and ESCAP secretariats on various activities undertaken by UNCTAD, in particular the integrated country programmes in Asian and African least developed countries. They were also briefed on arrangements for the high-level meeting on the integrated initiatives for the trade development of the least developed countries, which is scheduled to be held on 27 and 28 October 1997. It was agreed that UNCTAD would convene a meeting with representatives of ECA and ESCAP after the adjournment of the forty-fourth session of the Trade and Development Board in October 1997 in order to discuss matters of mutual cooperation in preparing for the third global review of the Programme of Action.

30. In accordance with the recommendation of the ninth session of the Conference, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD established the Trust Fund for the Least Developed Countries. The Trust Fund, which came into operation in early 1997, will facilitate new activities in the four main areas of work of UNCTAD, namely: globalization and development; international trade in goods and services, and commodity issues; investment, enterprise development and technology; and services infrastructure for development and trade efficiency. The Governments of France, India, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands and Switzerland have made contributions or pledges to the Trust Fund.

31. In cooperation with UNIDO, UNCTAD organized a pilot seminar on the mobilization of the private sector in order to encourage foreign investment flows towards the least developed countries. The Seminar, which was held at Geneva from 23 to 25 June 1997, discussed policy issues related to the establishment of foreign equity funds in the least developed countries and recommended that the Trade and Development Board consider, as a follow-up, the convening of regional expert seminars on issues identified during the pilot seminar, such as the flow of information on investment opportunities and improvement of financial infrastructure.

IV. ACTION BY ORGANS, ORGANIZATIONS AND BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

32. In its resolution 50/103, the General Assembly, inter alia, called upon international and multilateral organizations, financial institutions and development funds, the organs, organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, and all other organizations concerned to take immediate, concrete and adequate steps to implement the Programme of Action, taking full account of the measures and recommendations of the mid-term global review so as to ensure sustained economic growth and sustainable development in the least developed countries and to enable them to participate in and benefit from the process of globalization and liberalization.

A. United Nations

33. United Nations technical cooperation activities undertaken through the Department for Development Support and Management Services of the United Nations Secretariat were focused heavily on support to the least developed countries. The Department has taken steps, within the framework of the Programme of Action and the measures and recommendations of the mid-term global review, to assist the least developed countries in achieving sustainable economic development and growth and to assist them to participate in and benefit from the process of globalization and liberalization. More than two thirds of the total of expenditures of the Department were in relation to programmes and projects in the least developed countries. The Department provided technical support to the least developed countries in economic and social areas, and executed a number of regional projects on peace, reconciliation and the rehabilitation of African least developed countries. It has also provided technical assistance to a number of least developed countries in areas such as the management of water resources, minerals, energy financial management, public enterprises, privatization and environmental issues.

34. The Disaster Reduction Division of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat organized, financed and conducted subregional workshops on natural disaster reduction in 1994 and 1995, with participants from 48 African States drawn from Governments, non-governmental organizations, university research entities and specialized agencies of the United Nations system. They examined strategies to manage the prevailing natural hazards and thereby ensure food security and social stability, by arresting land

degradation, minimizing the effects of drought and insect infestations, desertification control, better food and epidemic management.

35. Progress has been made with regard to the exchange of information, raising awareness and the general recognition of needs in the fields of natural hazard assessment, vulnerability analysis, and the formulation of reduction strategies. A crucial gap remains with regard to the effective integration of disaster reduction into national development planning, bilateral or multilateral development strategies, and programmes and projects at all levels, and - most importantly - with regard to the availability of adequate financial support for the least developed countries for those purposes within the context of official development assistance (ODA).

36. There are strong similarities in the priorities identified in the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and the Programm of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s and the recommendations made in their respective mid-term reviews, particularly as they relate to creating a positive external environment for development. In view of the above, the Special Coordinator for Africa and Least Developed Countries, Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, has been very proactive in numerous forums in raising issues related to the need for the international community to assist in easing the debt burden faced by African countries, encourages foreign investment in Africa, expand market access and assist countries to diversify their export base. The Special Coordinator has also jointly organized a number of symposiums, workshops, expert group meetings and meetings in areas such as peace and development, the role of the informal sector in Africa, recovery and development, indicators of sustainable development and evaluation of special measures in favour of the least developed countries in Agenda 21.[10]

37. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) is currently undertaking operational activities at the country level in 28 least developed countries, which contribute, both directly and indirectly, to socio-economic recovery and sustainable human development. The activities are mainly concerned with capacity-building programmes to address the increasing problems of urban poverty and the consequent deterioration of the living environment experienced by most least developed countries. In least developed countries affected by conflict, Habitat's major rehabilitation programmes provide direct support to affected communities and promote the indigenous capacity to develop longer-term support to human settlements development. Capacity-building programmes at the local government and community level in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Haiti, Madagascar, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Somalia are directly concerned with strengthening the ability of local governments to work in partnership with communities in order to improve living conditions and create job opportunities through the construction and maintenance of urban basic services. Support provided by Habitat to the Governments of Bhutan, Burkina Faso and Nepal, is focused on maximizing the potential advantages for rural development of a reciprocal relationship between urban centres and their rural hinterlands. Habitat supported 34 least developed countries in their efforts to prepare national plans of action for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), and is currently formulating the Habitat Special

Programme for Africa which will focus on capacity-building in African countries and in particular for implementing national plans of action.

38. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has provided technical and capacity-building assistance in state-of-the-environment assessment reporting and associated data and database management to a number of the least developed countries. Since 1993, the environmental and natural resources information networking (ENRIN) project has assisted a number of developing countries, including least developed countries, in the definition of assessment, reporting and data and database management needs, the formulation of projects to meet those needs, and technical assistance in project implementation funding where funding has been secured. It has also promoted the strengthening of subregional intergovernmental organizational networks to exchange information for environmental management purposes.

39. Since 1990, UNEP has assisted many least developed countries throughout the world in the development and implementation of environmental legislation, and has provided training in environmental policy and law. The continuing work of UNEP at the global and regional levels relating to building an intergovernmental consensus on environmental issues and the action required to deal with them effectively, as well as promoting the implementation of environmental agreements and conventions, is of great relevance for better environmental management and promoting sustainable development in the least developed countries.

40. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is currently in the process of modifying its system for the allocation of general resources to country programmes. Under the proposed system, the share of general resources for programmes allocated to the least developed countries would increase significantly from its current level of 44 per cent. Most of the benefits would accrue to the countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The proposal is expected to come into effect in 1999. The Fund is a strong advocate of the 20/20 initiative, which is aimed at mobilizing the additional resources needed from the national budget and official development assistance to achieve the internationally agreed social goals adopted at the World Summit for Social Development and other international conferences convened during the first half of the 1990s. The Fund supports the follow-up to the 1996 Oslo Conference on the implementation of the initiative by supporting several country studies on the 20/20 initiative, mainly in the least developed countries. The Fund has facilitated initiatives to alleviate the debt burden by introducing debt-for-development swaps in several least developed countries, including Madagascar, the Sudan and Zambia. It has also supported innovative schemes which can give women increased access to credit. Further, UNICEF is envisaging a number of country studies, including studies in the least developed countries, to assess the impact of globalization on the social sectors, in particular on the well-being and rights of children and women.

B. Specialized agencies and related organizations

41. The World Bank, the lead agency for consultative group meetings, is a major source of multilateral assistance to the least developed countries. Almost all of the least developed countries fall into the Bank's category of low-income

countries and are thus eligible for financing on the highly concessional ter of the International Development Association (IDA). Total IDA lending to th least developed countries amounted to about US$ 1.8 billion in 1995. Agreem was reached in March 1996 on the eleventh replenishment of IDA, amounting to US$ 22 billion. Donor countries will provide US$ 11 billion, while the bala would come from repayments of IDA credits, past contributions and income fro the operations of the World Bank. The special commitment of IDA to Africa, including the 33 African least developed countries, within its overarching objective of poverty reduction was reaffirmed. Private sector growth and so and environmental sustainability were emphasized as the foundations of effec poverty reduction, and recipient countries were called upon to improve governance and to broaden participation by the poor in development. Access primary education, clean water, health services and basic infrastructure wer stressed as vital to the emergence of families from poverty.

42. The four main areas of action by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) with regard to the implementation of the Programme of Ac for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s are: reducing the financial burden; development of human resources; enhancement of cooperation between t least developed countries and other developing nations; and facilitating the transfer of technology. During 1994 and 1995, WIPO officials or consultants provided technical assistance to the majority of the least developed countri and more than 180 officials from 35 least developed countries benefited from WIPO training programme. During the biennium 1996-1997, particular emphasis being placed on long-term training, automation of intellectual property administration and enhancing the role of the intellectual property system in technological, economic, cultural and environmental development. Accordingl special attention is increasingly being given to the development of human resources, facilitating the creation or improvement of national or regional legislation, institution-building, and developing capacities and infrastructu for the management and exploitation of intellectual property rights.

43. The International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO has assigned top priority to t trade promotion needs of the least developed countries within the framework o the globalization of the market and the new international trading environment created by the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations agreements. Programmes for the least developed countries have focused on business enterprises and institutions and their adjustment to the new system, and on national capacity-building to take advantage of new market opportunities. In that regard, technical cooperation programmes with the least developed countr were designed to address those critical needs. The Centre has so far organiz 15 seminars and workshops on the Uruguay Round agreements for least developed countries, and more events are planned for 1997 and 1998. It also continues pursue integrated trade promotion programmes for the least developed countrie in close collaboration with other relevant agencies, notably UNCTAD and WTO.

44. The activities of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) are closel related to the component of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries on development, particularly expansion and modernization of the economic base. Under that activity, action for the environment and disaster mitigation, preparedness and prevention is directly in line with the technica cooperation programme of WMO. This programme comprises, mainly, the organize

transfer of meteorological and hydrological knowledge and proven methodology among the members of the organization, with the overall objective of enabling the national meteorological and hydrological services of members States, especially the least developed and other developing countries, to provide the best possible level of services so as to ensure public safety, management of water resources, support sustainable socio-economic development and safeguard the environment. The programme also provides equipment and spare parts, expert services, long-term and short-term fellowships, training and seminars. Each year about 130 countries, including the least developed countries, benefit from the programme.

45. Most of the least developed countries, being low-income food-deficit countries, benefit directly and indirectly from the wide range of technical activities of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the areas of agriculture, fishery and forestry. Of the 30 crop and food supply assessment missions carried out in 1996 within the framework of the FAO Global Information and Early Warning System, 21 were fielded to the least developed countries. Many least developed countries also benefit from FAO work on the agro-econological zone (AEZ) database and Geographic Information System (GIS). Through its Special Relief Operation Service, FAO responds to requests for emergency assistance in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and animal production and health submitted by countries affected by natural or man-made disasters. In 1996, 57 requests for humanitarian emergency assistance were approved, with a total budget of US$ 26.3 million, of which US$ 7.5 million was for 15 least developed countries. The pilot phase of the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS), which came into operation in 1994, and which is aimed at helping low-income food-deficit countries, covers 13 least developed countries. Programmes in four least developed countries have either been formulated or are under preparation. The plan is to extend the coverage, upon request, to all 87 low-income food-deficit countries, which include all of the least developed countries.

46. During the period January 1996-May 1997, 14 agriculture projects in the least developed countries, prepared with substantial input from the FAO Investment Centre, were approved for financing, mainly by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), IDA and the African Development Bank. The Investment Centre also assisted least developed countries in completing the preparation of a further five projects for eventual approval and funding by financing institutions.

47. Many least developed countries have benefited from the FAO programme directed at improving nutrition and food quality and safety, including for export. After the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, the FAO programme of work on policy assistance on the impact of changes in the external trading environment for agricultural commodity markets and implications for individual countries, in particular the least developed countries, was intensified and, in that connection it offers, in collaboration with the World Bank and WTO, sponsored regional workshops to review the basic provisions of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations agreements and to consider specific issues of interest, such as commodities of export interest, the relationship of food security concerns to structural adjustment

programmes, and the impact on small farmers. By early 1997, a total of 19 least developed countries had benefited from technical assistance of this nature.

48. In the fisheries sector, FAO has provided direct technical assistance to almost two thirds of the least developed countries. This activity has been intensified, particularly since the adoption of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s. In the area of forestry, activities in institution-building and capacity-building, planning and programming have been carried out in several least developed countries.

49. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has provided, in the 1990s, assistance in relation to the various aspects of civil aviation to 22 least developed countries in Africa and Asia, with due emphasis on air transport safety and sustainable human resource development. In addition, ICAO has prepared many project documents for future assistance to the least developed countries and is seeking the financial resources to implement them.

50. The Administrative Board of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) adopted, in October 1996, the Programme of Action in favour of the least developed countries for 1996-1999. This Programme of Action comprises a number of workshops and consultancy missions to the least developed countries in the areas of postal development, postal security and international postal accounting. In 1996, a number of technical assistance activities were provided by UPU to these countries within the framework of this Programme of Action. Moreover, UPU also implemented a number of projects financed by UNDP in Cambodia, Haiti, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, Sao Tome and Principe, the United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen. Training activities organized or envisaged in 1997 by UPU, from which the least developed countries will also benefit, are in the areas of postal development, postal security, service quality, and planning of human resources. Moreover, within its programme of technical cooperation for 1996-2000, UPU is implementing 25 multi-year projects in favour of the least developed countries.

51. The financial resources of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are made available to member countries through various facilities. During 1996, gross disbursements of concessional resources from IMF to the least developed countries totalled SDR 240 million, and net disbursements SDR 14 million. As at end-April 1997, the outstanding use of IMF resources under all facilities by the least developed countries, including non-concessional resources, totalled SDR 4.2 billion. The Fund has provided its member countries, including the least developed countries, with technical assistance and training in the following areas: (a) advice on the design and implementation of macroeconomic policy measures; (b) support for institution-building; (c) improvement of the quality and timeliness of statistical information; and (d) training of officials.

52. In addition to providing policy advice, financial and technical assistance, IMF has been catalysing additional financial and technical assistance, including debt relief, from other donors since the successful implementation of adjustment programmes is dependent on the timely availability of external financing in an appropriate amount and form. Adjustment programmes under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) have been supported by increasing the

disbursement of aid from multilateral and bilateral donors. In addition, further progress has been made in recent years in debt rescheduling on concessional terms and debt forgiveness. The Fund and the World Bank have initiated the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative[11] which was first implemented in April 1997, and which envisages exceptional assistance to a qualifying country from all its bilateral and multilateral creditors to reduce the current value of the country's debt to a sustainable level.

53. Of particular relevance to the least developed countries is the increasing attention that has been paid in recent years to the social impact of adjustment programmes. Policy framework papers associated with ESAF-supported programmes have included a discussion of the social impact of adjustment and in many cases mitigating social measures. Social policies are also increasingly incorporated as an integral part in the design of programmes supported by IMF, and targets for spending on basic social services, particularly in primary health and education, are specified. Under the HIPC initiative, programmes supported by IMF and the World Bank for countries qualifying for assistance are expected to emphasize social policies, including the improvement of the quality of social expenditure, strengthening of institutional capacity and the delivery of basic social services.

54. The intensified cooperation with countries in greatest need (IWC) initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO) was launched in five countries in 1990. Since then, there has been a slow but steady expansion in the number of countries participating. The IWC initiative is country-specific and is multisectoral and capacity-building in approach. It is aimed at ensuring the most effective use of all three levels of WHO support (country, regional and global) in each country, by assisting in the creation of comprehensive country strategies and plans, promoting intersectoral action in support of health sector development, and addressing specific country problems, especially those related to poverty alleviation and the protection of disadvantaged groups.

55. By 1996, IWC comprised more than 30 of the world's poorest countries, mostly least developed countries. Pursuant to the resolution in 1996 by the governing bodies of WHO to expand the initiative to embrace at least 40 countries, there has been many requests for participation. This expansion has, however, been limited by lack of funds. Up to 1997, 35 least developed countries had taken part in the initiative.

56. In accordance with its medium-term strategies for the period 1996-2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has assigned the least developed countries priority as beneficiaries of its activities and will allocate to them an important part of its resources. Since 1996, all UNESCO programmes have important activities of direct interest to the least developed countries. Furthermore, specific programmes in favour of the least developed countries are being implemented in the major areas of competence of UNESCO. In the field of education, the least developed countries have benefited from activities under the following programmes: widening access to basic education; improving the quality and the relevance of basic education; general and professional education; and higher education and development. In the area of development and social sciences, activities were undertaken in least developed countries in the areas of social transformation and development, and

youth and social development. In the field of culture, and in the context of the World Decade for Cultural Development, UNESCO, in cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Economic Development and Planning at Dakar, has initiated a special training project on culture and development. Assistance was provided to several least developed countries in the area of protection of sites, monuments and cultural properties.

57. The least developed countries have also benefited from UNESCO activities in the areas of communication, information and informatics. Activities in favour of the least developed countries have been undertaken in the context of the following programmes: towards a peace culture; contribution to the elaboration of national strategies for the elimination of poverty; contribution to meeting basic needs; contribution to the access to productive resources; and contribution to the access to credit and to access to information.

58. The programme for the least developed countries enjoys fundamental priority in UNIDO and constitutes one of the seven thematic priorities of the organization. Furthermore, the programmes and special measures for the least developed countries are regularly reviewed, discussed, amended and approved by all Ministers of Industry of the least developed countries during their biennial symposium, held in conjunction with the General Conference of UNIDO. The recommendations of those symposiums, after endorsement by the General Conference, establish the action programme of industrialization of the least developed countries. The fourth ministerial symposium will be convened at Vienna, from 27 November to 5 December 1997. The organization has also cooperated with UNCTAD in the organization of the pilot seminar on the mobilization of the private sector in order to encourage foreign investment flows towards the least developed countries.

V. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT MEASURES

A. External resources

59. The commitment by the international community, particularly the developed countries, to enhance aid to the least developed countries in order to achieve a significant and substantial increase in the aggregate level of external support to those countries, was one of the key provisions in the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s. To that end, a set of alternative aid targets and commitments were adopted to encourage donor countries to increase their efforts and improve their aid performance vis-à-vis the least developed countries. Since 1990, however, a number of major international and humanitarian crises, a global economic downturn, and domestic preoccupations and budgetary pressures in a number of the donor countries have dominated aid policies.

60. Resource flows to the least developed countries have remained stagnant in current dollar terms so far throughout the 1990s, and have diminished in real terms. The share of aid to the least developed countries in the combined gross national product (GNP) of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor countries has dropped from 0.09 per cent in 1990 to 0.06 per cent in 1995.

Collectively, donors have failed to meet the special aid targets and commitments for the least developed countries set out in the Programme of Action.

61. Few of the DAC donor countries have improved their performance with regard to the aid targets for the least developed countries since 1990; in most of these countries, the share of aid to the least developed countries in GNP was lower in 1995 than in 1990. However, four DAC countries continue to meet the 0.20 per cent target: Norway (the top performer with a percentage share of aid to the least developed countries of 0.31 per cent of GNP in 1995), Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden. In volume terms, Japan, the United States of America, France and Germany were the largest sources of ODA to the least developed countries in 1995.

62. In recent years, new resource flows to the least developed countries have consisted mostly of ODA from DAC sources, such flows reaching a level of US$ 16.6 billion in 1995. Since there was a net outflow of non-concessional resources from the least developed countries totalling US$ 0.6 billion, the recorded total flow of external resources to them amounted to US$ 16 billion on a net basis. Official flows other than ODA have diminished in importance as DAC countries, as well as international financial institutions, have shifted to providing mainly concessional finance to the least developed countries. Developments in external financing for developing countries as a whole, characterized by a steady increase in private investment and in total resource flows, have hardly affected the least developed countries at all. There has been no perceptible increase in private financing flows to the least developed countries, with the contribution of private capital remaining modest and fluctuating from year to year.

63. The trends in resource flows to the least developed countries reflect the decline in total ODA (to all developing countries) from DAC donor countries. The share of total ODA in the GNP of DAC countries dropped sharply, from 0.33 per cent in 1992 to 0.27 per cent in 1995. According to preliminary estimates, that share declined further to 0.25 per cent in 1996, the lowest ratio recorded since the United Nations adopted in 1970 the overall ODA target of 0.7 per cent of donor country GNP. Details about the geographical distribution of 1996 flows are not yet available but unless there has been a significant shift in aid allocations to the poorest countries, a further deterioration in aid performance vis-à-vis the least developed countries may well have taken place in 1996.

64. The external financing requirements of the least developed countries remain high because of the urgent need to overcome structural constraints and low human resource development. Securing an adequate share of available ODA resources, enhancing aid effectiveness and lessening aid dependency over time are the major challenges confronting the least developed countries in the future. Attracting assistance from countries other than DAC members and promoting the flow of foreign private investment to the least developed countries should be given high priority in view of the sluggish outlook for ODA from DAC countries.

B. External debt and debt relief

65. The external debt situation of the least developed countries remains a cause for serious concern. With scheduled debt service payments estimated to be in the order of one third of the aggregate export earnings of those countries, external debt-servicing obligations continue to be an important drain on resources and clearly exceed the capacity to pay of many of the least developed countries. As a consequence, they have accumulated massive payments arrears. The debt overhang compounds the pressures on the least developed countries attempting to implement structural adjustment programmes and tends to inhibit growth, as well as to dampen prospects for private capital inflows.

66. From the end of 1990 to the end of 1995, the outstanding external debt of the least developed countries increased by some US$ 20 billion, or 18 per cent, to US$ 135 billion. Most of the increase was due to new concessional lending by the international financial institutions. The total multilateral debt of the least developed countries increased from US$ 38 billion at the end of 1990 to US$ 55 billion at the end of 1995. Bilateral long-term debt to countries members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decreased slightly over the same period as a result of limited new lending and of debt relief operations.

67. The actual debt service payments made by the least developed countries, which had reached US$ 5.8 billion in 1989, fell steadily during the ensuing four years and remained far below the scheduled debt service. Correspondingly, the debt service ratio for the least developed countries as a group decreased, from 29 per cent in 1989 to 14 per cent in 1993 and 1994. This reflected difficulties in payment, as the debt service actually paid fell short of the scheduled debt service. Aggregate debt service payments by the least developed countries increased to US$ 6.4 billion in 1995, mainly as a result of repayments and clearance of arrears by Zambia as this country completed its rights accumulations programme with the IMF. Debt service payments by other least developed countries, however, increased. As a group they paid US$ 3.7 billion in external debt service in 1995, compared with US$ 2.9 billion in 1994. Excluding Zambia, debt service on multilateral debt made up just over 40 per cent of debt service payments made by the least developed countries in 1995.

68. Various debt relief schemes continue to be implemented. Since December 1994, the Paris Club has applied Naples terms to the rescheduling of the bilateral official debt of the poor and heavily indebted countries. The Naples terms offer a reduction of up to 67 per cent of the present value of eligible debts. By mid-1997, 19 least developed countries had obtained a restructuring of their debts under the Naples terms. Four of those agreements concerned the reduction of eligible debt stocks.

69. An important development in debt relief for the least developed countries came at the annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF in September 1996, with the endorsement of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative.[11] This initiative provides a useful framework for implementing a strategy of burden-sharing among all creditors to reduce the debt of heavily indebted poor

countries to sustainable levels. Debtor countries will have to show a track record of sustained strong policy performance, in principle over a six-year period. There are 29 least developed countries in the group of the 41 countries that have been identified as heavily indebted poor countries.

70. The HIPC initiative builds on the existing mechanisms for providing debt relief, particularly the Paris Club. Other bilateral and commercial creditors are required to provide debt relief comparable to the treatment provided by the Paris Club. Where existing mechanisms would not permit the achievement of sustainability upon completion of a first stage of adjustment and reform, enhanced action under a second stage is envisaged. Paris Club creditors have indicated a willingness to provide debt reduction up to 80 per cent in net present value terms on a case-by-case basis during this stage. Multilateral creditors will also provide additional support and relief. The World Bank has established an HIPC trust fund for financing the scheme, and has earmarked US$ 500 million as its own initial contribution to the fund. The IMF Executive Board in early 1997 also agreed on the modalities for IMF participation in the initiative through the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility.

71. As the first beneficiary, the eligibility of Uganda for assistance under the HIPC initiative was approved in April 1997. The eligibility of Burkina Faso might also be considered in 1997. Other heavily indebted poor countries will be considered on a case-by-case basis but because of the requirement for a long track record of policy performance, only a few least developed countries appear likely to benefit from the scheme during the current decade.

72. Another recent development in the field of external debt of particular relevance for the least developed countries is the understanding reached between the Russian Federation and the Chairman of the Paris Club in connection with the Denver Summit of Eight, held in June 1997, on the principles for the accession of the Russian Federation to the Paris Club as a creditor country. Provisions for adjustment in the amounts of outstanding obligations would have important implications for a number of least developed countries which owe substantial debts to the Russian Federation.

C. External trade

73. At the beginning of the 1990s, the share of the least developed countries in both world exports and imports fell by one half and one third from the already meagre levels of 0.6 per cent and 1.0 per cent, respectively, in 1980. Moreover, the ratio of their exports to GDP fell from over 17 per cent to 14 per cent during the same period. On average, the export patterns of the least developed countries have changed little over the past five years. Contrary to other successful developing countries, the least developed countries have not shared in the dynamism of export-led industrial growth: their share of manufactures in their total export has even decreased, from 44 per cent in 1990 to 38 per cent in 1995.

74. This deterioration in the foreign trade situation of the least developed countries has persisted throughout a period when many least developed countries have been engaged in major structural adjustment programmes and trade policy

reforms. In many cases, the least developed countries have devalued their currencies, liberalized their import policies and exchange restrictions, reduced their tariffs, and reformed their trade policy institutions, instruments and procedures. Several least developed countries have recently opened up to world trade and now generally rely much more on market mechanisms.

75. Globalization and liberalization have increased the potential for international trade to become an unprecedented engine of growth and an important mechanism for integrating countries into the global economy. These processes offer the least developed countries important long-term opportunities to reverse the economic decline that they have experienced over the past two decades but they also raise serious concerns for them. More than any other group of countries in the world, the least developed countries, with only a few exceptions, have become marginalized from the mainstream of global economic activity and from sharing in its benefits. Globalization may do little to alleviate the trend towards marginalization and, without adequate international support measures, may accentuate it.

76. It is thus encouraging to note that the trading opportunities of the least developed countries have been significantly enhanced by the improvements, made subsequent to the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations agreements, by major developed countries in their Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) schemes in favour of these countries. Improvements were also made in the trading regimes applied under special preferential arrangements, such as the Lomé Convention and the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act, for the least developed countries and other developing countries participating in such arrangements.

77. In May 1997, the Government of the United States of America introduced substantial changes into its GSP in favour of the least developed countries. It now grants duty-free access to more than 1,700 new products, specially in favour of designated least developed countries. This measure substantially expanded duty-free access to the United States market for a wide range of agricultural products, petroleum and petroleum products and industrial sectors not considered as sensitive. It also covers almost all food and processed food and fishery products, provided that imports find a place within the tariff quotas. This new facility is likely to create substantial new trading opportunities for the least developed countries. According to the indications provided by the Government of the United States of America, the new concessions for the least developed countries cover additional imports from African least developed countries of about US$ 2.5 billion.

78. Instruments applied by the European Union in favour of the least developed countries have undergone important changes after the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. The provisions of the Lomé Convention for duty-free and preferential market access for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States have recently been substantially expanded to include some sensitive agricultural products. Imports of industrial products and raw materials are already duty-free and benefit from relatively flexible rules of origin. Product specific tariff quotas and ceilings have been abolished. Instead, the European Union introduced a system of modulated tariff preferences.

79. The Government of Norway has substantially enlarged the coverage and treatment of agricultural products in favour of the least developed countries. Access is duty-free and quota-free for all agricultural products, except flour, grains and feeding stuffs, for which a 30 per cent preference is granted within indicative tariff ceilings.

80. Other preference-giving countries, in particular Canada and Switzerland, have also substantially revised their GSP schemes and expanded GSP benefits to a large number of new products. In Japan, the GSP provides for duty-free access for most industrial products imported from the least developed countries.

81. The World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference, held at Singapore in December 1996, adopted the Comprehensive and Integrated WTO Plan of Action for the Least Developed Countries. The Plan of Action includes measures in the areas of capacity-building and market access, and envisages, in particular, closer cooperation between WTO and other multilateral agencies assisting the least developed countries. The Ministers agreed to organize a meeting with UNCTAD and ITC as soon as possible in 1997, with the participation of aid agencies, multilateral financial institutions and least developed countries to foster an integrated approach to assisting these countries in enhancing their trading opportunities. A high-level meeting on the integrated initiatives for the trade development of the least developed countries is scheduled for 27 and 28 October 1997. Several intergovernmental and inter-agency preparatory meetings have also been convened. The high-level meeting will provide an opportunity for WTO members to announce, on an autonomous basis, the measures they are taking to enhance access for imports from the least developed countries. The meeting is also expected to adopt an integrated framework for technical assistance to support the least developed countries in their trade and trade-related activities.

82. In following up these commitments, the Government of the United States of America and the European Union have recently put forward proposals for further action in favour of the least developed countries in order to improve their export opportunities and investments.

83. The Government of the United States of America proposed a new Africa initiative with three components: the new concessions in favour of the least developed countries within the United States GSP scheme mentioned above; the establishment of a fund of US$ 150 million to promote, through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, private investment in Africa; and the establishment of another fund of US$ 500 million to support infrastructural programmes in the region. This support is intended for African countries that pursue sound economic policies and establish open markets.

84. In June 1997, the Council of the European Union called for a further commitment by WTO members, including the main trading partners and advanced developing countries, to grant the least developed countries duty-free access with simplified rules of origin and to present proposals on the basis of the WTO Plan of Action for further opening their markets that should be comparable to the market access offered by the European Union.

85. The Council called for the further analysis of the possibility of considering a consolidated preferential scheme to which all members of WTO were committed. The Council strongly supported the comprehensive approach pursued in the WTO Plan of Action.

86. The Council agreed on immediate new measures by the European Union to improve market access for the least developed countries. The Council will establish an equivalent treatment for all other least developed countries to the preferential treatment already given to least developed countries in the framework of the Lomé Convention by 1 January 1998, and will improve the GSP rules of origin. The European Union will apply further subregional cumulation in favour of integration groupings among developing countries, and will respond positively to requests for derogations from the applicable rules of origin requested by least developed countries.

87. Developing countries also adopted important decisions with regard to expanding membership or deepening their integration and preferential commitments which have a substantial bearing on the trading opportunities of certain least developed countries. States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed on the membership in ASEAN of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, for which ASEAN countries are amongst the most essential trading partners. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) decided to accelerate the establishment of the South Asian Free Trade Area, which should improve substantially trading opportunities for its least developed members Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

88. While the recent economic performance of a number of least developed countries is encouraging, recovery is still fragile and the medium-term and long-term challenges facing these countries, in a world economy transformed by globalization and liberalization, are complex. The mid-term global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s identified the following as the main challenges facing the least developed countries in the second half of the 1990s: to reverse the decline in economic and social conditions; to promote sustainable economic growth, development and structural transformation; and to avoid becoming further marginalized in the international economy.

89. To succeed in coping with the above-mentioned challenges, the least developed countries will need to further strengthen their national development efforts which, as is evidenced by those countries that have improved their performance, can make a difference. It is imperative to sustain economic reforms and effect further trade liberalization measures, pursue policies to tackle supply-side constraints, and improve the efficiency of agriculture. For a number of least developed countries, bringing political conflicts and civil strife to an early and peaceful conclusion and the restoration of a viable system of government must be a prerequisite to commencing any development programmes.

90. The challenges facing the least developed countries are beyond their capacity to overcome on their own. International support measures - financial, technical and commercial - are of critical importance in continuing to influence their future growth and development.

91. In the area of external financing, a reversal of the current trend in donor performance with regard to the least developed countries will require both a recovery in overall ODA and a reorientation of aid programmes towards the least developed countries. There is also a need for continuing to enhance the quality and effectiveness of assistance to the least developed countries. External finance should help fund major investments programmes in the physical infrastructure and social services which are necessary for helping the least developed countries to encourage substantial private investment. In addition, the least developed countries will need the active support of non-traditional donors. The least developed countries should continue their efforts to provide improved incentives for both domestic and foreign investment to attract foreign direct investment and other private capital flows.

92. Debt-relief measures for the least developed countries would help to release scarce resources in order to boost social and human development expenditure and to finance investment in critical economic restructuring in the short term and medium term. Reducing the outstanding debt of the least developed countries to sustainable levels through debt-relief measures, especially through the flexible application of the eligibility criteria for the HIPC initiative, will help relieve the pressure on the least developed countries and improve prospects for private capital inflows.

93. The timely and effective implementation of recent initiatives in favour of the least developed countries would enable them to actively participate in international trade, production and investment. Action to remove remaining barriers to trade and enhance effective market access would contribute to this process.

94. Easing supply-side constraints is critical to enabling the least developed countries to utilize the enhanced market access provided by the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations agreements. Many of the structural constraints that have frustrated the response of the economy to the new policy initiatives, such as weak technological capacity, lack of entrepreneurial and managerial skills and inadequate physical infrastructure, have to be tackled systematically. The WTO Plan of Action for the least developed countries contains recommendations on policy measures and programmes to enhance the trading opportunities of the least developed countries in order to facilitate their integration into the multilateral trading system. At a broad level, technical assistance, complemented by adequate financial support, should be provided to the least developed countries through the common and coordinated efforts of all donors, including international organizations such as WTO, UNCTAD, ITC, UNDP, the World Bank and IMF. Member States should seek to give operational content to the WTO Plan of Action, for example, by enhancing conditions for investment and providing predictable and favourable market access conditions for the products of the least developed countries, in order to foster the expansion and diversification of their exports to the markets of all

developed countries and, in the case of relevant developing countries, in the context of the Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing Countries.

Notes

[1] See Report of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Paris, 3-14 September 1990 (A/CONF.147/18), part one.

[2] A/50/745, parts one to three.

[3] The list of the least developed countries is currently comprised of 48 countries, the combined population of which was estimated at 588 million in 1995; the countries are: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen and Zambia.

[4] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.II.D.3.

[5] General Assembly resolution 46/151, annex, sect. II.

[6] Proceedings of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Ninth Session, Midrand, Republic of South Africa, 27 April-11 May 1996, Report and Annexes (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.II.D.4), part one, sect. A.

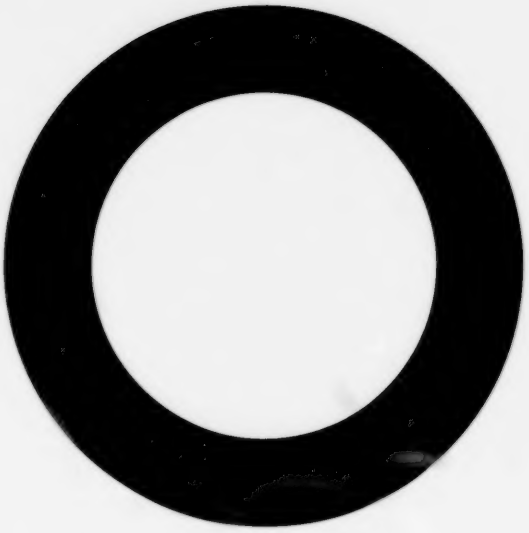
[7] Ibid.

[8] Legal Instruments Embodying the Results of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, done at Marrakesh on 15 April 1994 (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade secretariat publication, Sales No. GATT 1994-7).

[9] See ibid.

[10] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution I, annex II.

[11] For the objectives and details of the HIPC initiative, see IMF, "Debt relief for low-income countries and the HIPC initiative" (Working paper WP 97/24), Washington D.C., 1997.



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ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Outcome of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly

Report of the Secretary-General

Background

1. By its resolution 44/228 of 22 December 1989, the General Assembly decided to convene a United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

2. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held at Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992. The Conference resulted in the adoption of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,[1] Agenda 21[2] and the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests.[3] These documents were subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/190 of 22 December 1992. By the same resolution, the Assembly decided to convene, not later than 1997, a special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

3. In its resolutions 50/113 of 20 December 1995 and 51/181 of 16 December 1996, the General Assembly decided that the special session should be at the highest possible level of participation and the determined organizational modalities for the preparations for the special session, including the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as of other relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system. The Assembly recognized the important role played by major groups, including non-governmental organizations, in the implementation of the recommendations of

* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

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the Conference, and highlighted the need for their active involvement in the preparations for the special session, as well as the need to ensure appropriate arrangements for their contribution during the special session.

4. In its resolution 51/181, the General Assembly also decided to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-second session the item entitled "Special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21", and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at that session a report on the special session.

Work of the special session

5. The nineteenth special session of the General Assembly was held at United Nations Headquarters from 23 to 28 June 1997. The session was attended by 55 heads of State or Government or similar level officials, 178 ministers of various rank, and executive heads and high-level officials of a large number of the international organizations and institutions, both from within and outside the United Nations system, as well as representatives of numerous non-governmental organizations accredited to the United Nations.

6. At the nineteenth special session, a number of new features were introduced in the work of the United Nations. These include:

(a) It was the first session of the General Assembly that was organized for the purpose of a five-year review of progress achieved since a major global conference was held under the auspices of the United Nations. Experience gained during the preparations for and the proceeding of the special session would need to be carefully examined and taken into account in the preparations for other forthcoming special sessions of the Assembly that will carry out reviews of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcomes of other recent global conferences;

(b) The nineteenth special session was the first "summit"-level global meeting held on United Nations premises when a high-level debate in plenary meetings was held in parallel with negotiations on the text of the draft final document that were taking place in the Ad hoc Committee of the Whole of the Nineteenth Special Session established for that purpose;

(c) Furthermore, it was the first session of the General Assembly that provided an opportunity for the active involvement of non-governmental organizations, which were invited to address the Assembly and to make an important contribution both during the preparatory work carried out by the Commission on Sustainable Development and during the deliberations in the special session itself;

(d) The session involved a large number of participants from Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the media. It also included a large number of side-events, presentations and exhibitions. In a way, the scope of the meeting was more of a major global conference than a session of the Assembly. It showed a number of logistical limitations related

to holding such events on United Nations premises, whose physical capacities were almost exceeded during the work of the special session.

Outcome of the special session

7. The special session resulted in the adoption of General Assembly resolution S-19/2 of 28 June 1997, the annex to which contains the programme for further implementation of Agenda 21. The programme includes:

(a) A statement of commitment to Agenda 21 and to the goals of sustainable development, which call for integration of economic, social and environmental policies and actions at all levels, and to global partnership aimed at achieving sustainable development worldwide and meeting equitably the needs of present and future generations;

(b) Assessment of progress made since the Conference in all main areas of Agenda 21 and other outcomes and commitments made at the Conference;

(c) A broad range of decisions and recommendations aimed at fostering progress in various sectoral and cross-sectoral areas of Agenda 21 and, in particular, in its means of implementation. The Assembly also identified actions needed in a number of relatively new areas for international cooperation, such as sustainable transportation and sustainable tourism;

(d) Decisions aimed at strengthening global and regional institutional arrangements for achieving sustainable development;

(e) Recommendations on the future methods of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the programme of work for the Commission for the period 1998-2002.

Follow-up work at the substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and Social Council

8. Acting on the decisions and the recommendations of the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session, as contained in the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1997 (Geneva, 30 June-26 July 1997) adopted two relevant resolutions.

9. In its resolution 1997/63 of 25 July 1997, entitled "Programme of Work of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the period 1998-2002 and future methods of work of the Commission", the Council, inter alia:

(a) Approved the programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the period 1998-2002, and the provisional agenda for the sixth session of the Commission;

(b) Invited the Commission to adjust its future methods in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 132 and 133 of the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21;

(c) Changed the pattern of elections of the Commission's bureau (specific modalities for the transitional period from the current arrangements to the new ones are expected to be decided by the Council at its resumed substantive session of 1997).

10. By its resolution 1997/65 of 25 July 1997, the Council established, under the aegis of the Commission, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, which will report to the Commission at its eighth session, in the year 2000. The Council also decided that the Forum would hold its first organizational session in New York from 1 to 3 October 1997. At the organizational session, the Forum would decide on the programme and modalities of its work and recommend to the Council the number, venue and the duration of its substantive sessions to be held during the period 1998-2000.

11. In carrying out its functions related to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996, the Council has reviewed the work of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development and of the Committee on Natural Resources, inter alia with a view of making the work of these bodies "more compatible with and supportive of the programme of work of the Commission", the need for which was underscored by the Assembly in paragraph 135 of the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21. The Chairman's summary of the Council's deliberations on this matter is contained in the annex to Council decision 1997/310 of 25 July 1997. Further consideration of this issue will continue at the Council's resumed substantive session of 1997. The General Assembly is reminded that the Secretary-General's proposals on possible reform of these two bodies are contained in paragraph 135 of his report dated 14 July 1997 (A/51/950).

Follow-up action by the United Nations system

12. In the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly underscored that the achievement of sustainable development required continued support from international institutions. The Assembly felt that the institutional framework outlined in chapter 38 of Agenda 21 and determined by the Assembly in its resolution 47/191 and other relevant resolutions, including the specific functions and roles of various organs, organizations and programmes within and outside the United Nations system, would continue to be fully relevant in the period after the special session. The Assembly also stressed that, in the light of the ongoing discussions on reform within the United Nations, international institutional arrangements in the area of sustainable development were intended to contribute to the goal of strengthening the entire United Nations system. In that context, the Assembly stressed the particular importance of strengthening institutions for sustainable development.

13. Furthermore, the General Assembly underlined that it was necessary to strengthen the Administrative Committee on Coordination Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and its system of task managers, with a view to further enhancing system-wide intersectoral cooperation and coordination for the implementation of Agenda 21 and for the promotion of coordinated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences in the area of sustainable development. As

outlined in his report dated 14 July 1997 (A/51/950), the Secretary-General fully supports this concern of the Assembly.

14. The General Assembly also stressed that in order to facilitate the national implementation of Agenda 21, all organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, within their respective areas of expertise and mandates, should strengthen, individually and jointly, the support for national efforts to implement Agenda 21 and make their efforts and actions consistent with national plans, policies and priorities of member States. The Assembly also underscored that coordination of United Nations activities at the field level should be further enhanced through the resident coordinator system in full consultation with national Governments.

15. Shortly after the closure of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, on 9 July 1997, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development met informally in Geneva, during the Council's substantive session of 1997. This meeting was intended to serve as a "brainstorming" session to assess the results of the special session and to prepare for an in-depth discussion of ways and means for ensuring an effective and collaborative response to its outcomes by the United Nations system during the tenth meeting of the Inter-Agency Committee (to be held at Geneva on 17 and 18 September 1997).

16. The participants in the informal meeting of the Inter-Agency Committee agreed that the main challenge for the Committee and its task managers in the period after the special session would be to ensure a stronger focus in inter-agency collaboration on practical implementation, particularly at the country level. It was felt that that, inter alia, would improve linkages between the results of policy discussions and agreements reached at the international level with national sustainable development activities. In particular, it was agreed that it would be essential to make the best use of the experience and knowledge available in the United Nations system, including that of the task managers, with delivery capacities of the United Nations Development Programme at the national level. It was also agreed that it would be particularly important to develop further common approaches that would guide future system-wide work in all key areas of sustainable development.

17. Member States will be informed of the specific decisions taken and actions initiated by the Inter-Agency Committee in the context of a report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

Measures within the United Nations Secretariat

18. The ongoing consolidation of the three Secretariat departments in the economic and social fields into one consolidated Department for Economic and Social Affairs will, inter alia, lead to integration of the Secretariat's functions related to the provision of substantive support to intergovernmental processes and their normative setting activities, relevant analytical work and the provision of policy advisory services to Governments, at their request.

19. Accordingly, it is expected that the new functions of the Division for Sustainable Development will enhance the capacity of the Secretariat to support

action at all levels to implement Agenda 21, and to ensure greater coherence in the Secretariat's work in the area of sustainable development in general. This will include stronger support to regional, national and local activities, as well as further enhancing the dialogue and inter-action with the major groups and other actors involved in the implementation of Agenda 21.

20. In the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General to review the functioning of the High-Level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development and present proposals on ways to promote more direct interaction between the Board and the Commission, with a view to ensuring that the Board contributed to the deliberations on specific themes considered by the Commission in accordance with its programme of work.

21. As it was outlined in his report dated 14 July 1997 (A/51/950), the Secretary-General feels, however, that with the initiation by the Commission on Sustainable Development of promising new arrangements for consultation with and participation in its work by various actors from the civil society, the functions of the Board could now be effectively performed through those processes, and the Board could be discontinued.

Future reviews

22. In the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly decided that the next comprehensive review of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 by the General Assembly would take place in the year 2002. The Secretary-General will present his suggestions on the modalities of this review to the General Assembly at its 55th session, in the year 2000.

Notes

[1] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992 (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol. I and Vol. I/Corr.1, Vol. II, Vol. III and Vol. III/Corr.1)) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and Corrigenda), Vol. I: Resolutions Adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex I.

[2] Ibid., annex II.

[3] Ibid., annex III.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The General Assembly, by its resolution 51/69 of 12 December 1996, requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-second session and thereafter annually, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on ways to enhance the capacity of the Organization and of the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in the most integrated and effective way. The present report describes measures taken and the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action by the entities of the United Nations system since the submission of the previous report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/51/322). It also describes factors related to the capacity of the United Nations system in terms of human and financial requirements.

* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

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CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1 - 4	4
II.	PROGRESS IN MAINSTREAMING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN	5 - 43	4
	A. Results of the coordination segment of the 1997 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council devoted to the theme "Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system"	6 - 15	5
	B. Follow-up in the United Nations system	16 - 43	7
	1. Population Division	20	7
	2. Department of Public Information	21	7
	3. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements	22	8
	4. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	23	8
	5. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	24	8
	6. United Nations Children's Fund	25 - 26	8
	7. United Nations Population Fund	27 - 28	9
	8. United Nations University	29	9
	9. World Food Programme	30 - 31	9
	10. International Labour Organization	32 - 33	10
	11. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	34	10
	12. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	35 - 36	10
	13. World Health Organization	37 - 39	10
	14. World Bank	40 - 42	11
	15. United Nations Industrial Development Organization	43	11

CONTENTS (continued)

		Paragraphs	Page
III.	NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS	44 - 51	11
IV.	REPORTED ACTIVITIES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY	52 - 58	13
V.	MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION, INCLUDING HUMAN RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MEANS AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES	59 - 82	14
	A. Gender-sensitive programming and budgeting	60 - 65	14
	B. Developments with regard to strengthening capacity for gender mainstreaming	66 - 73	15
	C. Initiatives to increase the proportion of women in Professional posts	74 - 82	17
VI.	CONCLUSIONS	83 - 86	18

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 51/69 of 12 December 1996, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-second session and thereafter annually, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on ways to enhance the capacity of the Organization and of the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Conference in the most integrated and effective way, including human and financial requirements and measures taken and the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration[1] and the Platform for Action.[2]

2. The Secretary-General, in his previous report to the General Assembly on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/51/322, para. 2), noted the understanding of the Secretariat that the reports to the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council and the Assembly on the subject, requested by the Assembly in its resolution 50/203 of 22 December 1995, would be provided on a rolling basis: in each of his reports, the Secretary-General, while briefly summarizing results from previous sessions of the other bodies, would add new material. Therefore, three separate reports are submitted in the course of a year to the three bodies under the broader heading of follow-up to the Beijing Conference and mainstreaming a gender perspective.

3. An effort is made in each of the three reports to provide information that is most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body in order to facilitate intergovernmental decision-making. Thus, the reports to the Commission on the Status of Women emphasize efforts undertaken by the secretariat of the Commission in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective and other follow-up activities, the emphasis of the reports to the Economic and Social Council is on facilitating the coordination function of the Council and the reports to the General Assembly contain information from all entities in the United Nations system, including information from specialized agencies and international financial institutions, as well as an analysis of activities undertaken at the national level and by non-governmental organizations and civil society. Each report contains a section on means of implementation at all levels, including human and resource needs.

4. The present report provides an update of developments that have taken place in these areas since the submission to the General Assembly of the report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/51/322) in 1996.

II. PROGRESS IN MAINSTREAMING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

5. In the period under review, the activities aimed at the implementation of the Platform for Action at the international level focused on two areas: (a) mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system; and (b) efforts to enhance the capacity of the Organization and the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

A. Results of the coordination segment of the 1997 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council devoted to the theme "Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system"

6. In accordance with its decision 1996/310 of 13 November 1996, the Council discussed the issue of gender mainstreaming during the coordination segment of its 1997 substantive session. The report of the Secretary-General (E/1997/66) had been prepared in cooperation with entities of the United Nations system, in particular the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality.

7. During a panel discussion of senior United Nations officials[3] moderated by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, examples of cooperation and coordination in gender mainstreaming in areas such as accountability, best practices and lessons learned were presented and policy and experiences at the policy and country levels were highlighted. A total of 33 Member States, 9 United Nations entities, 1 intergovernmental organization and 1 non-governmental organization participated in the debate.[4]

8. Agreed conclusions 1997/1,[5] adopted by the Economic and Social Council, provide a definition and principles of gender mainstreaming (paras. 4-10). With regard to intergovernmental processes, the recommendations of the Council are addressed to the General Assembly, to the Council itself and its subsidiary bodies, including the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as to funds, programmes and regional commissions (paras. 12-18). At the institutional level, requirements for gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes are spelled out, and recommendations are put forward concerning (a) the role of gender units and focal points in gender mainstreaming, (b) capacity-building for gender mainstreaming and (c) gender mainstreaming in the integrated follow-up to United Nations conferences (paras. 21-44).

9. The General Assembly is encouraged to direct all of its committees and bodies and draw the attention of other bodies of the United Nations system to the need to mainstream a gender perspective systematically into all areas of their work, in particular in areas such as macroeconomic questions, operational activities for development, poverty eradication, human rights, humanitarian assistance, budgeting, disarmament, peace and security, and legal and political matters (para. 12). All bodies dealing with programme and budgetary matters, including the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC), are called upon to ensure in their work that all programmes visibly mainstream a gender perspective (para. 13). The Secretariat is requested to present issues and approaches in a gender-sensitive manner when preparing reports so as to provide the intergovernmental machinery with an analytical basis for gender-responsive policy formulation (para. 19). The Secretary-General is encouraged to demand accountability from senior managers to realize gender mainstreaming (para. 21). The agreed conclusions underline that the gender perspective should be systematically integrated in the ongoing reform process in the United Nations system, including in the work of the executive committees (para. 22).

10. The Council underlined the importance of monitoring gender mainstreaming in its decision to review annually the activities of its functional commissions and subsidiary bodies in this regard (para. 20).

11. The Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women has advised all members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) of the adoption by the Council of the agreed conclusions. Steps are being taken to bring them to the attention of all senior officials of the United Nations system. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has been the first to take specific follow-up steps to strengthen gender mainstreaming in all its sectoral areas and in terms of programming and planning. Gender capacity in the Office of the Executive Secretary has been reinforced, and focal points are being designated in all divisions of ECE to provide advice and support on gender mainstreaming.

12. Further action, such as follow-up by ACC and its endorsement of a set of gender mainstreaming principles submitted to it by the Inter-Agency Committee, the possible issuance of administrative instructions on gender mainstreaming and on the completion of programme budgets from the gender perspective, is under consideration.

13. The report of the Secretary-General (E/1997/66) and the recommendations of the Council for action on the agreed conclusions are primarily concerned with efforts at the intergovernmental and institutional levels. At the same time, Governments committed themselves in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action to reflect a gender perspective in all their policies and programmes. The efforts at the international level supplement governmental efforts at gender mainstreaming in national policies and programmes.

14. Increased attention should, therefore, be paid to supporting and monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies at the national level. A number of efforts are already under way. For example, the workshop of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality and the Expert Group on Women in Development (WID) of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development to be held in September will assess collaboration and partnerships for gender mainstreaming and, in particular, the donor/country interface. A preliminary analysis of national action plans received by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat provides some indication of the extent to which gender mainstreaming is actively pursued as a part of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference at the national level, and the report to be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women in 1998 will provide a basis for further recommendations. Progress in gender mainstreaming at the national level could be at the core of the discussion in 1999 by the Commission of critical area of concern IV.H (institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women).[2] The comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action, to be initiated in 1999, will provide an opportunity for an integrated assessment of gender mainstreaming and, in particular, of the linkages between the national level (Governments) and the international level (intergovernmental bodies and entities of the United Nations system).

15. The General Assembly may wish to take action, in accordance with the recommendation of the Council, directing all its committees and bodies to mainstream a gender perspective in their work and drawing the attention of other bodies of the United Nations system to this requirement.

B. Follow-up in the United Nations system

16. The secretariats of organizations and other entities of the United Nations system have continued to take steps to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action within their respective mandates since the previous report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/51/322) was submitted to the General Assembly.

17. In his report to the Economic and Social Council (E/1997/64), the Secretary-General reported on the results of the forty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women and other functional commissions of the Council, as well as activities by the regional commissions. The report also reflected the outcome of the second session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, which continued its efforts in support of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. The second session was held in New York on 5 and 6 March 1997.

18. Information on efforts by entities of the United Nations system that are particularly relevant to implementing the Platform for Action is presented below. It is based on the contributions requested by the Division for the Advancement of Women, which focused on additional action taken by the relevant entities in support of the implementation of the Platform for Action since the submission of the previous report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/51/322) and on means of implementation, including new human resources, financial means and structural changes.

19. The present report does not include information on the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which are reflected in the reports submitted to the General Assembly by each of those entities.

1. Population Division

20. During the period under consideration and in the context of the follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development held at Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994, the Population Division of the Secretariat carried out research on the topic of male/female differences in infant and child mortality. The 1996 revision of the report Too Young to Die: Genes or Gender[6] provides an update on gender-specific population estimates and projections.

2. Department of Public Information

21. The Department of Public Information of the Secretariat printed and distributed copies of the Platform for Action and organized, jointly with the Division for the Advancement of Women, panel discussions on its implementation. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Department, in cooperation with the Division, organized an exhibit and published brochures. The Department also organized jointly with the

Division a discussion on women at the peace table on the occasion of International Women's Day.

3. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements

22. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) focused on incorporating the gender perspective into the design and implementation of the Habitat Agenda (A/CONF.165/14, chap. I, resolution 1, annex II), adopted by the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul from 3 to 14 June 1996. In order to achieve that, the Centre worked in close cooperation with the Huairou Commission on Women and Habitat and other women's organizations. The Habitat Agenda includes such issues as gender equality, women's rights to land, property, resources and women in decision-making. To ensure gender-sensitive implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Centre assists its partners in the field (non-governmental organizations and individual women at the grass-roots level) by linking their activities to its monitoring work and supporting national mechanisms for the advancement of women.

4. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

23. A trust fund project of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on follow-up to the implementation of major global conferences financed by the Government of the Netherlands includes a component on follow-up to the Platform for Action. The resources are being utilized for undertaking activities aimed at enhancing the participation of women entrepreneurs in the economies of least developed countries.

5. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

24. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) focused on promoting the human rights of refugee women by addressing the issue in all programmes and stressing the need of asylum on the basis of gender-based persecution. Furthermore, it launched special initiatives to integrate refugee women from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from Rwanda into the mainstreaming of economic rehabilitation through, inter alia, skills training and legal assistance. Another development programme for refugee women in the period 1996-1997 addressed the need for mainstreaming refugee women's problems and the gender perspective in peace-building activities.

6. United Nations Children's Fund

25. Within the framework of the implementation of the Platform for Action at the national level, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided assistance in the design of gender-sensitive policies and the preparation of national action plans. At the regional level, UNICEF, in collaboration with other United Nations entities, organized various meetings to discuss the follow-up to the regional plans of action.

26. Furthermore, UNICEF carried out a number of activities targeting girls and women, such as designing a regional strategy to address female genital mutilation in eastern Africa and launching a regional project in south Asia in order to combat domestic violence against women and girls. Several innovative projects address the needs and rights of adolescent girls.

7. United Nations Population Fund

27. At the country level, a major goal of programmes funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is to ensure universal access by both women and men to reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health, and to advance the status of women and girls. Programme funding support is provided to Governments, often in partnership with non-governmental organizations, especially women's organizations and youth groups.

28. Several major initiatives have been undertaken recently; for example, UNFPA organized, in 1996, jointly with the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights, the round table of human rights treaty bodies on human rights approaches to women's health, with a focus on reproductive and sexual health and rights. UNFPA is also in the process of assessing the extent to which gender issues and perspectives are being mainstreamed within its funded programmes in 12 countries. As part of this process, a draft conceptual framework and preliminary indicators on gender mainstreaming have been formulated.

8. United Nations University

29. The United Nations University has carried out policy-oriented studies and projects on new technologies and their impact on women workers. The projects assess the potential of telework for creating employment and career opportunities for women and explore the impact of information-intensive modes of production on women's employment in the region of Asia and the Pacific.

9. World Food Programme

30. The Commitments to Women of the World Food Programme (WFP) address women's equal access to food, education and income-earning opportunities. The progress report on the implementation of the Commitments to Women, submitted to the Executive Board of WFP in March 1997, contains information on (a) specific strategies to reach the most disadvantaged, particularly women, (b) women's involvement at the local level and (c) indicators for tracking women's use of the benefits of food-for-work activities.

31. All memoranda of understanding between WFP and its implementing partners now emphasize that the specific needs of women have to be taken into account, that women are to be involved in the management of food aid and that reports should reflect the share of benefits received by women and review the positions held by women in managing food aid.

10. International Labour Organization

32. As part of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference, the International Labour Organization (ILO) launched in 1997 the International Programme on More and Better Jobs for Women. A number of countries have been selected for the implementation of the Programme, which has been designed to improve the quantity and quality of women's employment in the context of globalization.

33. While strengthening its mainstreaming strategy, ILO will organize a meeting on women in management and a workshop on gender and labour administration in the second half of 1997.

11. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

34. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continued to implement three priority areas identified by the 1995 FAO Conference: gender mainstreaming within the organization, providing assistance to Member States in gender mainstreaming and increasing the representation of professional women within the organization. Each division has developed a specific programme of action and has assumed responsibility for its implementation. FAO also developed sex-disaggregated statistics and information on rural populations. The information is disseminated via its site on the World Wide Web and through various workshops.

12. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

35. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continued its activities to implement the six resolutions that outline its work on gender issues. The resolutions refer to stereotyping of women, women and the media, women's contribution to a culture of peace, the status of women, sexist wording in UNESCO basic texts and the 12 critical areas of concern as they relate to the mandate of UNESCO.

36. Field officers working on gender issues have strengthened their network by using the Internet. Specific strategies were elaborated to support women in the field of science and technology.

13. World Health Organization

37. During the reporting period, the World Health Organization (WHO) organized, in collaboration with UNESCO, a round table on health and education, focusing on school environment, nutrition and empowerment of women.

38. WHO was active in the field of training. A training course on gender and reproductive health was designed for health services in developing countries. Furthermore, WHO launched a project to sensitize health workers to the specific needs of abused women.

39. WHO published studies on issues related to women and health, including the following: domestic violence; women, health and environment; women at work; gender and care; and women with disabilities. It also launched a plan to prevent female genital mutilation in Africa and reviewed activities that had taken place in that regard.

14. The World Bank

40. The World Bank intends to integrate a gender perspective in all its programmes, country assistance strategies and projects. Therefore, gender has been systematically addressed in issues regarding education, population, health, nutrition and rural development. Furthermore, the World Bank intends to give more attention to gender in sectors such as transport and energy.

41. In order to disseminate information about its activities regarding gender, the World Bank set up a home page on gender on its internal web. The home page will be placed on the external web by 1 September 1997. Also, in June 1997, the World Bank published the second annual progress report on the implementation of its gender policies.

42. The World Bank enhanced its collaboration with civil society by convening the second annual meeting with its External Gender Consultative Group. The Group, comprised of 14 leading gender specialists from different regions and sectors of civil society, gathered to give feedback on the gender-related policies and programmes of the World Bank.

15. United Nations Industrial Development Organization

43. To support the implementation of the Platform for Action, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has initiated and pursued the implementation of a programme to promote women entrepreneurs in six African countries. On the policy level, UNIDO assists the Government of Colombia in increasing the participation of women in the manufacturing sector.

III. NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

44. In its resolution 1996/6, section III, of 26 July 1996, the Economic and Social Council decided that voluntary submission by Governments of national information, for example national action plans or national reports, on the implementation of the Platform for Action, should be encouraged. In its resolution 51/69, the General Assembly urged Governments that had not yet done so to undertake efforts to develop comprehensive implementation strategies or plans of action, including time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring, in order to implement fully the Platform for Action.

45. In order to prepare a synthesized report on the implementation of the Platform for Action, based, inter alia, on national action plans and any other sources of information already available in the United Nations system, for the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, in 1998, the

Secretary-General sent to Member States, a second note verbale dated 17 June 1997, inviting them to submit national implementation strategies or information on the status of their preparation. The deadline for submission was extended to 31 July 1997.

46. In an effort to assist Member States in the preparation of national action plans, the report of the Subregional Conference of Senior Governmental Experts on the Implementation of the Platform for Action in Central and Eastern Europe, held at Bucharest from 12 to 14 September 1996, was translated into all official languages of the United Nations and made available to Member States. The report contains the outline of a model national action plan.

47. As at 5 August 1997, the Secretariat received 54 national action plans and priority plans. Some of the plans had been prepared with the assistance of non-governmental organizations, which had helped the Governments to collect information on the needs of women or had actually participated in drafting the plans. Many non-governmental organizations had also prepared their own national action plans.

48. A preliminary analysis of the received national action plans indicates that many Member States have developed action plans focusing on a select number of critical areas of concern that constitute their national priorities. The critical areas most frequently addressed by Governments have been education and training of women, women and health and women in the economy. Less frequently selected have been areas such as women and the media, women and the environment, the girl child, and women in armed conflict. While some of the national action plans are very detailed and action-oriented, many do not go beyond declarations of intent in the area of policy-making.

49. The synthesized report will examine the critical areas that Governments emphasize, the ways in which Governments translate into strategic action their commitment to the implementation of the Platform for Action. It will focus on the elements identified in the Platform for Action (para. 297) that are essential to the establishment of the national strategy, such as consultations with relevant institutions and non-governmental organizations, as well as persons at the highest level of authority in government and in civil society. The report will also provide information on time-bound targets, benchmarks and mechanisms for monitoring, as well as proposals for allocating or reallocating resources for implementation. Emphasis is also being put on identification of national and regional priorities and on institutional arrangements that may strengthen the implementation of the Platform for Action. The report will also address the capacity for mainstreaming gender concerns at the national level.

50. Within each critical area of concern, the types of action proposed are being analysed to determine, inter alia, whether they introduce policies and programmes, legislative or administrative measures, set benchmarks, propose institutional arrangements, allocate resources, or pay attention to special groups.

51. To date, 26 national action plans have been placed on the World Wide Web (http://www.un.org/womenwatch/list.htm) and are thus accessible to a large audience.

IV. REPORTED ACTIVITIES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

52. At the international, regional and national levels, non-governmental organizations continued to take part in the follow-up to the Beijing Conference. Their activities have not been reported systematically to the Secretariat, but those that have been brought to the attention of the Division for the Advancement of Women since the previous report on the subject was submitted to the General Assembly are noted here as examples of the widespread follow-up to the Conference by civil society.

53. To commemorate the first anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, various non-governmental organizations held meetings, workshops and exhibitions. For example, in Thailand, a regional forum entitled "Looking beyond Beijing" was organized by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development and a two-day event was organized by the Thai Women Watch to commemorate the Beijing Conference. Other countries in which non-governmental organizations held special events to commemorate the Beijing Conference include Israel, Nigeria and the United States of America.

54. The NGO Forum on Women issued a book containing speeches from its plenary meetings at the Conference, entitled Look at the World through Women's Eyes. Also, the November 1996 issue of Network News: a Newsletter of the Global Link for Midlife and Older Women carried special articles to commemorate the Beijing Conference. Through the efforts of non-governmental organizations several booklets summarizing the Platform for Action and/or highlighting issues of particular concern in specific countries have been published. For example, in Vanuatu, such a booklet was published in English and Bislama as a result of a collaborative project of the Government of Vanuatu, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and various women's groups. In Kenya, a simplified version of the Platform for Action was published. Shirkat Gah, a women's group in Pakistan, published a simplified version of it in Urdu.

55. There are numerous ongoing efforts by non-governmental organizations to monitor progress in implementing the Platform for Action. The Women's Environment and Development Organization has published two progress reports on action taken by Governments during the first year after the Beijing Conference, entitled "Beyond promises: Governments in motion - one year after the Beijing women's conference" and "Promise kept, promise broken? A survey of Governments on national action plans to implement the Beijing Platform". The International Women's Tribune Centre has continued to actively share monitoring information through its Faxnet. Non-governmental organizations continued to organize meetings and workshops in various countries, including Argentina, Croatia, Ecuador, Egypt, Kenya, Thailand, Uganda and Uruguay, to monitor the implementation process at the national and regional levels. The newsletters of many non-governmental organizations have also been carrying regular articles on activities carried out as part of the follow-up to the Conference. For example, a newsletter issued by the Geneva NGO Subcommittee on the Status of Women with the Non-Governmental Organization/ECE working group on women disseminated information on initiatives undertaken by European women's groups as follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

56. Supported by decisions of the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women, representatives of non-governmental organizations participated at the forty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in 1997. They served as experts on panels and made interventions during dialogues. They also took part in consultations between non-governmental organizations and Member States which were facilitated by the Division for the Advancement of Women and which addressed those critical areas of concern under consideration by the Commission at its forty-first session. Funding was made available for a small number of representatives of non-governmental organizations from the least developed countries to attend the forty-first session. Selections were made based on knowledge and experience in the area of concern under consideration by the Commission.

57. Women's non-governmental organizations participated actively at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, held from 23 to 27 June 1997 to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21. They called for the mainstreaming of gender in all sectors of implementation and for greater coherence with the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women in related areas. At the seventeenth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, held in New York from 7 to 25 July 1997, informal consultations were held with non-governmental organizations on country reports, a practice which the Committee decided to continue in future. The Committee also invited non-governmental organizations to an informal meeting to initiate the preparation of a general recommendation on article 12 of the Convention, on women and health. Non-governmental organizations having expertise in that critical area of concern made statements suggesting issues and approaches to be addressed by the Committee in its general recommendation, including points from the Platform for Action. The Committee agreed to continue to consult non-governmental organizations in preparing its general recommendations.

58. Women's organizations also played an active role in the Conference on Governance for Sustainable Development and Equity, held in New York from 28 to 30 July 1997.

V. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION, INCLUDING HUMAN RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MEANS AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES

59. The General Assembly, in its resolution 51/69, requested the Secretary-General to report on ways to enhance the capacity of the Organization and of the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in the most integrated and effective way, including human and financial requirements.

A. Gender-sensitive programming and budgeting

60. There is a growing interest in strengthening accountability for follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to gender mainstreaming through accountability for resources allocated to this task. To that end, a number of new efforts are under way to determine with greater clarity how programme and project resources benefit women and men respectively as a result of gender

mainstreaming, both nationally and internationally, and to design budgeting processes in a way that would a priori account for gender factors. In parallel to gender-sensitive budgeting in all areas, resources allocated specifically for implementation of the Platform for Action, both nationally and internationally, may be an indicator as to how various actors participate in the implementation of the Platform for Action.

61. Attention to a gender-sensitive use of resources is reflected in agreed conclusions 1997/1, on gender mainstreaming,[5] where the importance of adequate and, if need be, additional human and financial resources for gender mainstreaming from all available funding sources is noted (para. 10). The Council also emphasized the need for gender mainstreaming in programme and budgetary matters when calling on, inter alia, CPC and the governing bodies of funds and programmes to ensure that medium-term plans and programme budgets implement gender mainstreaming (paras. 13-14).

62. The Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality highlighted the issue of gender-sensitive budgeting in drawing the attention of ACC to the need for assessing programme budgets and budget codes in order to determine what resources go into gender mainstreaming. The Committee established a working group to conduct an assessment of the issues that would need to be addressed in that regard. Efforts undertaken by other institutions and entities, including Governments, and the Commonwealth Secretariat, will be reviewed, and their advice sought, as appropriate.

63. In the United Nations system, ILO has allocated additional resources for gender training.

64. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) has committed approximately 15 per cent of its Special Voluntary Fund for 1997 to gender mainstreaming within the framework of the Platform for Action. Through a cost-sharing arrangement with a number of donor countries, a programme has been jointly prepared with the United Nations Development Programme and UNIFEM to assign 20 UNV gender-in-development specialists to country offices to facilitate the work of the resident coordinators in system-wide follow-up to the Platform for Action, including the work on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment.

65. Although women's projects and programmes of UNIDO are financed nearly exclusively from extrabudgetary resources, and no additional human resources are available, structural changes and new management approaches foster more intensified and productive teamwork throughout that organization.

B. Developments with regard to strengthening capacity for gender mainstreaming

66. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has recently decided to establish a gender unit. The unit will be responsible for the continuous monitoring and evaluation of all the policies, programmes, projects and activities of the Centre from a gender perspective and for building up gender competence among staff in the Centre and in the field.

67. Substantive elements concerning the gender dimension in the work of UNCTAD are being identified. A workshop on selected trade, development and gender aspects is under preparation to assist in identifying ways and means of promoting the mainstreaming of gender dimension in UNCTAD programmes and policies.

68. In an effort to mainstream gender issues within the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), an informal gender working group was established in January 1995 under the guidance of the Focal Point on Women for UNDCP. The membership of the working group has gradually expanded since then. It now includes all three divisions of the UNDCP, with representatives from the relevant technical, operational and administrative sections. In addition, there are field office members in the UNDCP regional offices in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The members of the working group rotate in chairing the monthly meetings. The 1997 work plan for the working group includes drafting guidelines on integrating gender issues in UNDCP programmatic activities and in field projects.

69. In order to ensure the integration of key aspects of the Platform for Action into country programming and translating provisions into concrete action at UNHCR, a reference group on refugee women has been set up. The group is chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees.

70. At ILO, training activities in gender issues in the world of work have been carried out at headquarters and in the field for ILO staff and constituent members. Plans have been made and will be implemented in 1997 to incorporate gender aspects into management training courses for all ILO staff. Two new senior specialist posts on women and gender, based in regions, have been created. And, an additional post has been established at ILO headquarters in the Office of the Special Adviser on Women Workers' Questions.

71. In order to mainstream gender, FAO upgraded the capacity of its staff by providing gender training workshops.

72. At UNESCO, a new unit for the promotion of the status of women and gender equality has been established by the Director-General. It comprises the overall coordination and the specific programmes on women and a culture of peace and on women in the Mediterranean. This new structure has led to a more articulated and concerted collaboration with the focal points of the sectors, the programme specialists responsible for projects, field offices, national commissions, major intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and other partners. In addition, staff in the UNESCO secretariat and in the field will receive training on gender issues before the end of 1997.

73. At the World Bank, gender analysis and policy activities have been strategically linked to economic policy work, as gender was established as one of the four families in the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) Network. Responsibility for the implementation of gender policies has been more closely linked to regional management, and the participation of women's organizations at the grass-roots level has been strengthened through the recruitment of non-governmental organization coordinators in most resident missions.

C. Initiatives to increase the proportion of women in Professional posts

74. Agreed conclusions 1997/1[5] state that gender balance is another central goal in gender mainstreaming (para. 36). It is recommended that the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women should be regularly provided with statistics on the number and percentage of women at all levels throughout the whole United Nations system; moreover, the ACC Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions and the International Civil Service Commission should monitor progress in staffing policies aimed at achieving gender balance.

75. The report of the Secretary-General on the status of women in the Secretariat, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, will provide an overview of progress in achieving the goal of gender balance in the Secretariat. Based on the recommendation of the Council, the Assembly may wish to decide that, in future, comprehensive statistical information should be provided on the level and percentage of women system-wide.

76. The present report provides some examples of changes in the number of Professional women in the United Nations system in the period under review.

77. In her statement made at the coordination segment of the 1997 substantive session of the Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees noted that, following the Beijing Conference, significant progress had been achieved but the results were still far from satisfactory. The proportion of Professional female staff in UNHCR was 38.7 per cent and women regional coordinators had been deployed in the field.

78. UNV has focused on achieving gender balance within its own staff by recruiting and promoting qualified women. Approximately 50 per cent of the UNV programme officers in the country offices are women. Efforts are being undertaken to reach that figure for the percentage of women among all UNV specialists and field workers.

79. The Executive Director of WFP highlighted substantial increases in the number of female staff at all levels since 1992. In particular, women had accounted for 18.9 per cent of staff at the P-5 level and above in December 1996, compared with 9.2 per cent in 1992. The overall recruitment of female staff had increased from 12 per cent of total recruiting in 1994 to 39 per cent in 1996. In 1992, there had been no women at a level higher than P-5. In December 1996, female staff had been at the D-1 (24.4 per cent), the D-2 (25 per cent), and the ASG/USG (33 per cent) levels. Project staff numbers in country offices had the lowest levels of gender balance, 20 per cent, and would receive increased attention in the years ahead.

80. In order to increase the representation of women at the Professional level, FAO developed strategies to identify suitable female candidates and established a roster of international experts working in the area of women in development to be considered for future vacancies.

81. At UNESCO, the percentage of Professional women has increased from 30.03 per cent in 1990 to 37.12 per cent in 1997. UNESCO has designed special strategies to identify and attract women candidates for posts at the Professional level.

82. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has focused on enhancing the status of Professional women within that organization. In order to support the representation of women in Professional posts, ICAO has set concrete targets and launched activities to identify suitable female candidates. However, that strategy has not produced the desired results. Applications received from female candidates have been mainly for administrative and language posts, which constitute a small percentage of the posts in the Professional and higher categories. Budgetary constraints resulting in the freezing of about 12 per cent of the positions in ICAO, have also adversely affected recruitment programmes.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

83. Since the previous report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/51/322) was submitted to the General Assembly, significant progress has been made in terms of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, and in terms of mainstreaming a gender perspective, by the three-tiered intergovernmental mechanisms and the Secretariat and other entities of the United Nations system. The adoption by the Economic and Social Council of agreed conclusions 1997/1, on gender mainstreaming, stands out as the most comprehensive intergovernmental action to date on gender mainstreaming. It constitutes a firm basis from which to proceed expeditiously with concrete steps to achieve measurable progress in gender mainstreaming at all levels and in all areas. The Assembly may wish to take action on the recommendations submitted to it by the Council in the agreed conclusions.

84. A number of specific opportunities for further strengthening follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and on gender mainstreaming can already be identified. The consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women of a synthesized report on national action plans in 1998 will provide a comprehensive assessment with regard to action at the national level and a stepping stone for the initiation of the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action, scheduled for 1999. The mid-term review of the system-wide medium-term plan on the advancement of women, 1996-2001, by the Commission and the Council in 1998 should accomplish the same purpose with regard to action within the United Nations system.

85. A broader assessment of and recommendations for further action with regard to gender mainstreaming at the national level remain to be made. These might be accomplished on a priority basis during the consideration of critical area of concern IV.H institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women[2] by the Commission on the Status of Women in 1999.

86. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1997/61 of 25 July 1997, on integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of the major United

Nations conferences and summits, reaffirmed that system-wide gender mainstreaming must form an integral part in the implementation of decisions of recent United Nations conferences and summits. The Council is planning to hold a session in 1998, immediately following its organizational session, to further consider integrated conference follow-up; the planned session should provide an opportunity to build upon the agreed conclusions on gender mainstreaming and to proceed with their systematic reflection in any future integrated conference follow-up by intergovernmental bodies, including efforts to enhance the dialogue between the Council, its subsidiary bodies and the funds and programmes and organizations of the United Nations system.

Notes

[1] Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.

[2] Ibid., annex II.

[3] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Executive Director of the World Food Programme, Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund and Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Organization.

[4] The following Member States participated in the debate: Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada (on behalf also of Australia and New Zealand), Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Finland, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Kenya, Luxembourg (on behalf of the European Union), Namibia, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, United Republic of Tanzania (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China) and United States of America.

The following United Nations entities participated in the debate: United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Development Fund for Women, International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health Organization and World Bank.

The International Organization for Immigration and the American Association of Retired Persons also participated in the debate.

[5] To be issued in the report of the Economic and Social Council (A/52/3).

[6] ESA/P/WP.126.

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Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session: Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report to the General Assembly on the work of the twenty-ninth session of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, held in New York from 10 to 13 June 1997, is submitted pursuant to Assembly resolution 38/183 O of 20 December 1983. The meeting was chaired, upon my request, by Ambassador Mitsuro Donowaki of Japan.

2. I met with the Board on 10 June and requested the members to explore during the session the new security and disarmament challenges for the twenty-first century and the evolving role of the United Nations. At the time the Board was meeting, I was in the process of formulating my proposal for reform of the United Nations, including the disarmament sector of the Organization (see A/51/950, paras. 120-126). I thus requested the Board to provide me with its views on this matter.

3. Below are some of the salient points of the Board's deliberations on those items.

A. Reorganization of the United Nations disarmament sector

4. The Board made four recommendations on reorganization of the disarmament sector of the Secretariat:

(a) All the members of the Board except for one concluded that the responsibilities of the disarmament and arms control sector of the United Nations would increase, and thus supported strengthening its staff and resources. They pointed specifically to additional tasks and duties in the area of practical disarmament in the conventional field, the implementation of arms agreements regarding weapons of mass destruction, the facilitating of regional agreements and confidence-building measures and the present and future tasks associated with the implementation of international agreements on anti-personnel landmines;

(b) Members agreed that the chief representative for disarmament affairs should be at either the Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General level;

(c) Most members felt that the chief representative in disarmament affairs should report directly to the Secretary-General on most matters;

(d) Most members, but not all, agreed that it might be better to base the section of the Secretariat dealing with

* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

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disarmament in New York, while maintaining close liaison with disarmament activities at Geneva.

5. Some members of the Board felt that a sweeping reorganization of United Nations disarmament activities might have to wait until the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament. For that reason, some of them reiterated the need to convene the special session as soon as possible. Some other Board members reiterated their proposal to convene a broader-based United Nations-sponsored international conference on peace, disarmament and international security.

B. New security and disarmament challenges for the twenty-first century and the role of the United Nations

6. Against the backdrop of the end of the cold war and the diminished possibility of global nuclear confrontation, the Board discussed the security consequences of economic globalization, the lessening of the importance of national boundaries and the increase in intra-State conflict and illicit trafficking in small arms and other criminal activities. It also noted that the actors on the international scene were diversifying and were no longer limited to States. The most serious security threat representing that trend in recent years was the increase in intra-State conflicts and terrorist activities.

C. Conventional arms

7. The Board sought to identify possible roles for the United Nations with respect to conventional weapons. The changes in the security situation as described above require what are called "practical" disarmament measures, including preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. Four issues were discussed under that heading.

1. Register of Conventional Arms

8. The Board considered that the Register of Conventional Arms, now in its fifth year of operation, was significantly contributing to transparency in conventional armaments and building confidence among nations. Unlike similar international reporting systems, it noted, the Register had recorded data on transfers of conventional weapons from nearly 100 Member States every year. It also noted that the Group of Governmental Experts currently reviewing the operation of the Register was considering ways and means to consolidate, strengthen and improve it. The Board foresaw an increasing role in the coming years for the United Nations Secretariat in the maintenance and operation of the Register.

2. Small arms

9. The Board was convinced that the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons in some regions of the world posed a threat to regional and global security. For that reason, it looked forward to reviewing the conclusions and recommendations of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/70 B, of 12 December 1995, which was finalizing its report to the Assembly at its fifty-second session.

10. The Board noted the view expressed by the Chairman of the Panel, a member of the Advisory Board and its Chairman that in order to reduce the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of such weapons, the root causes of conflict, including poverty, political disputes, injustice and suppression of human rights needed to be addressed; that democratic processes would have to be promoted; and that the capability of Governments to guarantee security to its citizens would have to be enhanced.

11. For those reasons, the Board considered that the coordinated inter-agency effort of the United Nations in West Africa, involving the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization appeared to be the most appropriate and effective approach. A lesson learned in that region, the Board noted, was that solutions to the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms would have to be region-specific. Conscious of the reluctance among donor countries to provide development assistance for the maintenance of internal security ("security-first" approach), the Board recognized that efforts would have to be made to raise the awareness of the donor community to the need for such assistance and to promote cooperation among all concerned.

3. Disarmament, good governance and peace-building in West Africa

12. The Board heard a report from one of its members on the integrated United Nations inter-agency exercise, started in Mali in 1995, which had been extended to other parts of West Africa. (That project grew out of the United Nations Advisory Mission on the control and collection of light weapons in the Saharo-Sahelian subregion, which began in August 1994.) The Board took note that a moratorium on the

production and transfer of small arms was under discussion by the parties in the region, that a better network of information sharing among police, customs officials and border patrols — a kind of regional register— was being encouraged and that cooperation from the supply side was also being explored.

13. The Board welcomed the pioneering work being done in the region. In its opinion, the United Nations was proving itself an important facilitator of cooperation among the regional partners in West Africa and between the region and arms suppliers, and was playing a key role in exploring the applicability of that approach to other regions.

4. Anti-personnel landmines

14. The Board considered that the United Nations had a vital role to play in preventing and reducing the proliferation of anti-personnel landmines. It took note of the efforts under way to prevent proliferation by strict compliance with and wider adherence to the amended Protocol II of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. Most members of the Board regarded the parallel efforts of the Ottawa Process (see A/C.1/51/10, annex) and the Conference on Disarmament as complementary: the Ottawa Process sustained the urgency of the issue, but the objective of universality would not be achieved without the involvement of the Conference on Disarmament.[1]

15. A convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines is to be negotiated at a diplomatic conference to be held at Oslo from 1 to 19 September 1997, and signed at Ottawa between 2 and 4 December 1997. The Board noted that in the envisaged Ottawa agreement the Secretary-General and the United Nations would be expected to play several roles, not only serving as depositary, but also having some responsibility for the future convention's implementation, including making existing minefields safe and reducing land mine inventories.

16. The Board strongly welcomed the efforts already under way to reduce and eliminate such weapons and the significant role played by the United Nations in mine clearance and mine awareness in the context of peace operations.

17. Some Board members felt the stress on efforts to conclude a total ban on anti-personnel landmines tended to minimize the importance of the agreement reached under the amended Protocol II, as well as the overwhelming importance of the need to focus international and United Nations efforts on the humanitarian aspects of the issue and their financing.

D. Weapons of mass destruction

18. Most Board members were of the view that activities related to implementation, transparency, compliance and verification of already existing regimes in the field of weapons of mass destruction would acquire greater importance in the coming years. They recalled that the Security Council, at its historic meeting at the level of Heads of State or Government in January 1992, expressed its commitment to take concrete steps to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations in the area of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.

19. That, however, did not diminish the strong support of Board members for promoting the creation of new norms relating to weapons of mass destruction, efforts which were complementary to the implementation of existing norms. It remained convinced that the negotiation of agreements to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, should still command the highest attention and the strongest efforts of the international community. Concerns were expressed about the need to continue to seek a reliable verification regime to tackle the growing dangers of biological weapons owing to rapid advances in scientific research.

20. The Board recognized that the Secretary-General and the United Nations would continue to play an important role in both norm-making and implementation of agreements relating to weapons of mass destruction. The Board noted that the primary responsibility for implementation of agreements lay with the bodies established by those agreements to perform those tasks, but that the United Nations could oversee the smooth functioning of those regimes and ensure the effective coordination of their activities.

21. The Board highlighted the specific responsibilities assigned to the United Nations in the case of serious non-compliance with the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, as well as in the International Atomic Energy Agency/Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons safeguards agreements. It noted that another instance of United Nations activity in the field was the work of the United Nations Special Commission, which could be regarded as the first case of enforced post-conflict arms control and disarmament in United Nations history.

II. Meeting with representatives of non-governmental organizations

22. As it has done in the past, the Board met with representatives of the NGO Committee on Disarmament (New York). They addressed the next steps in nuclear disarmament, reducing conventional arms and armed conflict, access of non-governmental organizations to the First Committee and the Disarmament Commission under the new structure for servicing those meetings and reform of the disarmament sector of the Organization.

23. They circulated several documents, including proposals for a model United Nations treaty to ban nuclear weapons and a comprehensive treaty on conventional arms.

24. Some members of the Board applauded the important contribution of the non-governmental sector in having sustained political support at a high pitch for the finalization of the nuclear-test-ban treaty and in continuing to sustain the momentum towards a total ban on anti-personnel landmines.

III. Composition, role and future work of the Advisory Board

25. The terms of many of the members of the Board had expired since its last session in July 1996. I wish to commend the retired members for their invaluable contribution to the work of the Board. I welcomed the new members who participated in the twenty-ninth session. (See annex for list of Board members and participants in the twenty-ninth session.)

26. As the members of the Board are chosen in their individual capacities and not as representatives of States, they are placed in a unique position in the United Nations disarmament system. Individual members thus may offer independent advice to the Secretary-General, while ensuring that the realities of the diplomatic and security world are taken fully into consideration in the deliberations of the Board. Thus the Board can advise me openly and independently on all matters related to disarmament under my authority.

27. At future sessions, the Board plans to continue its deliberations on weapons of mass destruction and on conventional armaments, particularly practical measures of disarmament, including anti-personnel landmines. It shall keep under review the situation with respect to the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament. In addition, it was suggested that the Board's future work could focus on the growing importance of new technologies developed in the commercial sector and their possible applications to weapons (dual-use technologies), the commercial use of satellite imaging and its military implications and the burgeoning cost of disarmament (safe dismantlement of weapons and implementation and verification of arms agreements). In that regard, a suggestion was made that UNIDIR prepare appropriate papers on the last three topics as a possible additional way to focus the work of the Board.

28. For reasons of continuity, the Board recommended that it meet at least twice a year. The Secretary-General has also proposed two sessions a year for the next biennium (A/52/6 (Sect. 2), para. 2.128 (a) (viii) (b)). Further, underlining the importance of its role as Board of Trustees of UNIDIR, it suggested that, in order to meet with the incoming Director of UNIDIR as early as possible,[2] the next session take place sometime in December 1997 or in January 1998.

Notes

[1] On 26 June 1997, the Conference on Disarmament appointed a Special Coordinator to conduct consultations on a possible mandate on the question of anti-personnel landmines (CD/1466).

[2] Upon the unanimous recommendation of the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR, the Secretary-General appointed Ms. Patricia Lewis as the Director of the Institute. She will assume her position on 13 October 1997.

Annex

Members of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Mr. Munir AKRAM[a]
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of
Pakistan to the United Nations Office at Geneva
Geneva

Mr. Serge Raymond BALE
Ambassador
Under-Secretary-General
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
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Mr. Hanan BAR-ON[a]
Ambassador
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[a] Participated in the twenty-ninth session, 10-13 June 1997.